

KATHIE STUART'S TERROR.

BY ETHELIN B. BRANDE.

"School will commence Monday, mother. I hope you 've got the children ready to go."

"Of course I have. I believe I generally do what belongs to me. If everybody worked as many hours as I do, their work would n't get much behindhand," answered Mrs. Salome Heath, pushing back the supper-table, placing two chairs in the prim row against the wall, and then commencing to flourish the broom even as she spoke.

"Ha, ha, Salome; you don't mean me, I suppose," said Wade Heath, with a laugh that wrinkled his round, good-humored, weather-crimsoned face, all over, until it looked like a last year's apple. "I wonder

if you 'd like to have me lay aside my pipe and newspaper and finish planting that radish bed. Is that it, mother, eh?"

"If the coat fits put it on," answered Mrs. Salome tartly, while a strange quivering round her mouth betrayed her inclination to smile.

Wade Heath laid down his newspaper, and knocked the ashes out of his pipe against the pillar of the weather-beaten porch. Then he took down the almanac that hung under the looking-glass, beside the scarlet pincushion and a panned comb-case.

"Fourteenth day of April, I declare," said he. "I might have known it, though, for this is Saturday, and school begins

Monday, the sixteenth. 'T is high time them radishes were planted. If the seed is put in the ground tonight, the Lord will be making it grow all day tomorrow, while we 're at meeting."

"I thought it might as well be done tonight, so I had Robbie rake the bed and make the drills this morning. Here 's the seed."

"Well done, Salome, so you 're tendin' to my work as well as your own. I always knew the Beresfords were main smart folks."

"I only wish some of my children had taken after them."

"So they have, mother, so they have. They 're merry as the Heaths, and smart as the Beresfords. I 'm proud of my children, Salome, and proud of my wife too."

"Pshaw, Wade Heath."

"I am, and I 've reason to be. There, give me a kiss, mother, and own that we 're about as happy and as well off as most folks in Mayford."

"Go along, you old pester. A'n't you ashamed of yourself, right afore the children too? There, I think you 'd better go out to the garden now, if you 've made a fool of yourself long enough."

"Yes, yes, I 'm going. Where 's the seed? Here, Robbie, you may go with me. Oh, I 'd like to have forgot, mother, what I was going to tell you. Mrs. Owen 's got one of her nervous spells, and she can't have the school-ma'am next week to board. So she 's coming here."

"Well, there! I never, Wade Heath! If you a'n't enough to provoke a saint!" exclaimed Mrs. Heath, setting down the pile of milk-pans she was conveying to the but-tery, and standing still to look at her husband, while the color flashed all over her face.

"And you 've known this ever since yesterday, and never told me."

"Why, I did n't suppose it would make any difference, mother. We always have enough to eat, and we 've plenty of rooms for the little girl to sleep in, so why can't she come?"

"I have n't said she could n't come, and I guess I could lodge a dozen people for that matter; but I do think I might have been told before. I should have made pound-cake instead of gingerbread, and baked some custard-pies today, if I 'd known, and we must have some chickens

dressed tonight, and early Monday morning you must go over to the village and get some coffee, for we 've only souchong in the house, and maybe she won't like that."

"Well, well, mother, if that is all, it will not be much trouble to prepare for Miss Stuart. I knew it would be all right, after all."

So saying, Wade Heath went out and into his garden.

Mrs. Heath looked after him, and shook her head.

"What a plague men are!" she said, at first, as she thought that after her hard Saturday's work there was still more to be done, because of her husband's negligence; but as she heard his cheery laugh from the garden, and the merry shouts of little Robbie, her only son, her heart softened and the frown was smoothed from her comely brow.

"He is a good man, after all, if he is a little slow in his ways, and it would be a shame for me to complain."

So, though there was an extraordinary bustle in the farm-house that night, and much unexpected labor performed, the frown did not come back, nor was a sharp word uttered; and though Mrs. Heath sought her couch that night with a wearied frame, her heart was light and warm with an undefined feeling of thankfulness and control. It was as if for the first time in her busy, anxious life, for Mrs. Heath was a very Martha in her household. She had learned a little of her husband's worth, and felt the joy that centred in the group of lovely children for whom, henceforth, her oil was to be less a burden for the lesson she had learned. How it came to her she could not tell, neither could any other person.

The sabbath—the long, quiet, country sabbath—passed as usual. When the red sun sank at last behind the bank of gray and purple clouds that rested upon the western horizon, sabbath quietude was at an end, because in the farm-house there were many necessary labors to be performed, and the children, weary of the day's restraint, would steal out into the soft spring twilight, and were laughing and chattering in a merry group beneath the ancient elm-trees that sentinelled the farm-house gate.

But their voices were hushed, and the little ones shyly stole behind their elder sister, as a light wagon was driven up to

the gate, and a young man, leaping out, with a great show of rustic gallantry assisted his companion to alight.

A slight female figure in gray floating robes, with her face closely veiled, she stood in their midst. The children were sure that their teacher had come, but not one of them dared utter a word, till a sweet voice said, while a light hand was laid on Kitty Heath's head, —

"Are you Mrs. Heath's little daughter? Please, then, show me into the house. I am Miss Stuart, and I have come to stay with you a week or two."

All Kitty's fears vanished, and, putting her hand into that of her teacher, the child led her to the door, where Mrs. Heath already stood with welcome beaming on her face. The teacher's little trunk and basket were brought in, her wraps removed and carried away in little Kitty's willing arms, the kettle replaced on the kitchen fire, and the table drawn out for the guest's supper, before Mr. Heath came in. As he went up to speak to the teacher in his hearty voice, and to clasp her little fingers in his welcoming hand, Mrs. Heath came in with a light, and the children caught the first glimpse of the face they had been longing to see.

It was a young face, with softly rounded lines, but startlingly pallid and wan. An expression of exquisite sadness had settled about the mouth, and when the long brown lashes which swept the white cheek were raised for a moment, they disclosed dark hazel eyes, whose fleeting expression was wild and haggard in the extreme.

There was a startling intensity in the quick glances she threw about her, and which expressed an almost mortal fear in spite of a shuddering effort at repression. Mrs. Heath, good woman though she was, was wont to be easily prejudiced. Every time she caught that startled glance she felt sure there was something suspicious in it; but the next moment the mournful sadness of Miss Stuart's face, when in repose, aroused her sympathy. But, as hostess, she was too much occupied in her cares to leave much time for thought, until it was time to conduct her guest to her chamber. Then she noted the anxiety with which Miss Stuart inquired about the fastenings of the doors and windows, and the situation of the other rooms and outer doors, and the helpless, terrified manner in which she clung to little Kitty, who, with a child's cu-

riosity, had followed them into the room, and begged that she might be allowed to remain and share her bed.

"I guess you've never been away from home before, Miss Stuart," said Mrs. Heath. "Why, there's nothing on earth to be afraid of here in this retired spot, and we never think of fastening our doors."

"Oh! fasten them tonight, dear Mrs. Heath," cried Miss Stuart, clinging wildly to her garments as she was going away. "Indeed, I can never lie down to rest until I know that all is secure. I should die of fear before morning."

Mrs. Heath promised, though she was sure that it was very ridiculous. But, do what she would, she could not convince herself that the poor girl's sufferings were real, and founded on some sufficient cause. Mr. Heath had noticed her frightened glances, and the two discussed the matter at some length, long after little Kitty was soundly sleeping in the trembling arms of Miss Stuart. The long night had almost passed before the young teacher fell into a restless sleep, and when she appeared at Mrs. Heath's well-spread breakfast-table she was pale and spiritless, and quite unable to do justice to the nice broiled chicken and smoking coffee and fresh eggs which headed the list of dainties set before her.

Mrs. Heath prided herself upon her cookery, and hardly knew whether to be most vexed or sorry to behold her visitor's lack of appetite. But her pale face won compassion, and the luncheon-basket was so crowded with nice things to tempt Miss Stuart's noonday appetite, that when she and her little group of pupils at length set off for the brown school-house, the scene of her future labors, Robbie Heath complained bitterly of its weight.

Miss Stuart proved an excellent teacher. Her sweet voice, and gentle, winning manner, won the affection of her pupils, who pitied her for her pale face and the mysterious fear that so continually haunted her. But a mystery it still remained; even Mrs. Heath, whose house was the home where, after her term of boarding had closed, she came every Saturday to be nursed and petted like a sick child until Monday morning arrived with its duties, had failed to solve it.

Pupils and parents had almost ceased to talk of Miss Stuart's strange fears, and had gradually grown so accustomed to her pale

face, as to forget it in her winning manners. Never had been a teacher so beloved, — never in Mayford a school so quiet and orderly as hers, and never had the “young idea” been taught to shoot more rapidly. The summer was waning, and the four months of Miss Stuart’s engagement were drawing to a close. Every day the expression of relief became more marked on her countenance and the frightened glances of her brown eyes less frequent; while a faint rose tint was stealing over her fair cheek. She was evidently far happier and more at ease than when she first arrived. It was Friday evening; and Mrs. Heath, from her seat upon the porch, saw Miss Stuart hurrying along the road almost dragging Kitty, whom she held by the hand, in her frantic haste, while the little group of younger children, with Robby at their head, were left far behind.

“La, me! What can be the matter?” she exclaimed. “Wade Heath, do come here. Now what do you suppose that means?”

A puzzled expression came over Wade’s good-humored face, but as he had nothing to say, he only shook his head, an operation which he had not completed when the flying pair reached the gate.

“What’s the matter, Miss Stuart? You’ve near about frightened me to death, seeing you running so. Are you hurt, or scared, or what is it?” questioned Mrs. Heath, as she hastened to open the gate, and assist the panting girl to reach the house.

“Oh, let me go to my room. Dear Mrs. Heath. I must be alone, just a little while. Kitty will tell you.” And Miss Stuart fairly shut the door in her kind friend’s face; and then, with an expression of hopeless terror, threw herself upon her knees, and buried her face in the pillow.

“Again! again!” she murmured. “And it is ever thus. So soon as the haunting dread begins to be lifted from my spirit, and the almost forgotten quietude of the olden times comes stealing back, that horrible face appears before me; he dogs my footsteps with his insane threats, and his presence near me drives sleep from my pillow, and peace from my bosom. Must it be ever thus?”

Thus sobbing and praying and sobbing, the poor girl remained, until the twilight shadows filled the room, when she rose, and

glancing fearfully around, prepared to join the family in the common room. Starting at every sound, and trembling at every shadow, she stole through the hall and down the stairs; and, as she sat at table that night, Wade Heath’s pleasant face grew sad as he saw the traces of that afternoon’s struggle with mortal terror on that of his young guest.

Meanwhile Kittle had told her tale: As the scholars were busy at their afternoon tasks, some of them had been startled by the sudden appearance of a wild, haggard face, surrounded by matted hair, and with fiery eyes gleaming out of its deadly palor, at one of the windows. Miss Stuart did not see it; but, ere she had time to learn the cause of their irrepressible exclamations, the same face showed itself at the open door, and a tall, gaunt man, clad only in fluttering rags, strode into the room. The scholars screamed, and Miss Stuart, in her terror, seemed frozen into stone, as this strange figure approached her desk.

“Ha! my beautiful princess,” he said, with a fantastic bow. “Adorable lady of my love. I have found you at last, and tomorrow shall be our wedding day. The winds have sung it to me on the mountain-top, and the brook prattled of it to the stones in its bed, and the breeze that waved the tall grass beside my pillow of earth murmured all night the story of the loves of the King of Trebizond and the Princess Lulu. Dost thou hear me, fair princess?”

He would have come nearer, but Miss Stuart, with a gesture of repulsion, fled from him to the corner of the room. The affected smirk faded from his face, his eyes became like coals, — almost sparkling in lurid light. Suddenly he drew a large knife from some hiding-place beneath his rags, and darted toward her. He pursued her beyond the door, from which, ere this, all the pupils had escaped, when suddenly some new thought seemed to cross his crazed brain, and, dropping the knife, he sat down upon the threshold, and buried his face in his hands. And there they left him; for no one had the courage to return, while he remained, to close the door.

“Now, my dear,” said Mr. Heath, as soon as supper was over, “can you tell me anything about this man who frightened you all so this afternoon? Have you seen him before? and what should be done with him? Don’t tell me any more than you like; but

I and the hired men are going over to the school-house now, to see if we can find him, and perhaps you can tell us where he belongs, and how to manage him."

"Oh, Mr. Heath, don't go tonight. Indeed it is not safe, for he is armed with that terrible knife, and at times he is very violent."

"The more reason he should be looked after, my dear. But don't cry, there's a good girl. Just tell me, if you can, where he belongs, and if he has any friends who should be notified of his being here?"

"He belongs in C—, and he has been shut up in the poor-house for security; for he has no friends."

"Ah! well, then, I know what to do. Salome will take care of you till I come back, and, if possible, we will secure him first; so go to sleep if you can, and dismiss your fears."

And, though Miss Stuart would fain have dissuaded him, the good man strode away, with a stout farm-laborer on each side of him; the whole party well armed with knives and pitchforks, and Mr. Heath carrying proudly the rusty old musket that "Gran'ther Heath" had shouldered in '70.

Mrs. Heath sent the children to bed, fastened the door, and then led Miss Stuart to her apartment. Little Kittie, her fright already forgotten, was sleeping soundly by her side, as Miss Stuart at length unburdened her heart of its weight of fear and sorrow, and wept upon the bosom of her kind friend.

Kathie Stuart, the child of a poor widow, with no dowry but her innocence and beauty, had been seen, when she first stepped across the threshold of womanhood, by Walter Moncrief. He was a man of strange, fierce passions, eccentric in manners, coarse, and often violent in conversation, unhand-some in face and figure, and altogether one to excite repugnance rather than regard in the heart of a gentle, refined young maiden. But he loved Kathie, in his own fierce way, and was determined to win her. For years he persecuted her with his unwelcome attentions, and poisoned the whole current of her existence, till she came to fear him only less than she abhorred him. His whole being was absorbed in the pursuit, and the result that might have been confidently predicted at length took place. Stung by repeated and peremptory rejections of his suit, and roused to fury by the

favor bestowed upon another, whom he chose to call his rival, reason gave way; he became a frantic maniac, and Kathie's lover was the earliest victim of his insane violence. With the giant strength of madness Moncrief assailed him at night, in the quiet suburb where his home lay. No power of a single arm could cope with his, and he prevailed. The next morning, his mangled form was found lying upon the rocks at the water-side, below the bridge, from which Moncrief had hurled him headlong to his fate.

Henceforth, Kathie had lived in mortal terror. No place of confinement had ever been formed from which Moncrief had not contrived to escape. He haunted her path with his maniac threats, appearing at such unexpected moments that she had come at last to expect him always: hence the wild, startled glances that continually shot from her dark eyes. More than once he had attempted to destroy her life, and the fear of him had come to embitter every moment. She had enjoyed a few weeks of comparative quiet at Mayford, for she had heard that he was at length securely confined in the county poor-house. But suddenly he had appeared before her, and the horrible burden of terror had rolled back upon her soul.

Mrs. Heath had great faith in her husband, and she soothed the weeping girl, and repeated so many times that she was sure "Mr. Heath would secure the crazy man," that at length Kathie became composed; and, finally, worn out by the violence of her emotions, fell asleep. Not till then did Mrs. Heath steal away to her own bed.

Mr. Heath and his men searched for hours, but unsuccessfully. There were traces enough of the maniac, but he was not to be found. At length, late at night, they returned home, all thoroughly wearied, and were soon sleeping soundly.

Out of this, their first sleep, the household were suddenly roused by repeated shrieks from Miss Stuart's room. Mr. Heath reached the door in time only to catch a glimpse of a figure flying through the window, and bounding down the garden-slope with the speed of a deer.

Miss Stuart had been awakened by an exclamation from Kittie, as the child threw herself across her breast. At the same moment she felt a burning pain in her shoulder, and Kittie's screams were added to her

own. The whole scene had passed so rapidly that neither could tell more. The knife with which Moncrief was armed had pierced Kittie's arm, and then remained quivering in Miss Stuart's shoulder. But for the child's sudden motion it would probably have reached her heart.

The wounds, though severe, were not dangerous, and Kittie soon recovered. But Miss Stuart lay many weeks, nursed tenderly by Mrs. Heath. Indeed, the winter snow lay deep upon the earth before she found herself again beneath the arching sky. Months before that the maniac had been secured with strong chains in the poor-house cell. There, chafing and raging against his bonds like a wild beast, he had worn away the thread of life. When he became too feeble to do any one harm, he was released, and cared for tenderly to the end. But Kathie was free at last: the winter snow lay white and deep upon his grave.

The joy and elasticity had gone from her youth long ere this. Relieved of the terror which had haunted her earlier years, its effects remained visible upon her health. Life was a burden almost too heavy to be borne, and its duties were discharged and its responsibilities met mechanically. She seemed almost too passionless to regret, too languid to hope.

Every summer she taught the school in the little brown school-house, and her home was with Mrs. Heath. That good lady, whose sharp tongue had of old been somewhat dreaded, had become so mild and gentle in view of the deeper trials of her young friend, that Wade Heath sometimes laughingly declared that his life was too tame and monotonous, and he quite longed for the spice with which she had been wont to season it.

After Kathie Stuart's hair had become very gray, and her once round face showed many a wrinkle, she married an ancient widower who needed a housekeeper, and a mother for his horde of unruly children. Contrary to everybody's expectations, her own, probably, included, she was very happy in this marriage. Her sweet voice, and gentle, yet firm manner, tamed the boisterous children; and her husband, who dearly loved quiet, loved her as the cause of that which was soon apparent in his well-ordered household.

Age had destroyed the illusions of youth, and all her dreams of romance had long faded. Life, filled at last with real, practical cares and duties, presented itself to her worthfully. Her old burdens fell from her weary shoulders, and the new ones were borne with all the lightness of youth.

LORD TOM.

BY MISS E. E. KENYON.

I was visiting at my aunt's house in Brooklyn.

My aunt was a vain little woman, easily flattered, and easily taken in. Before her marriage she had "lived out" part of the time, and at other times had earned a living with her needle. Then it was a matter of principle with her not to wear silk. It was not because she could not afford it, but because she considered it better taste for young girls to dress simply.

Since she married my uncle, however, her ideas of dress had changed considerably. Silk was indulged in frequently now, — perhaps because she no longer considered herself a young girl. At any rate, she made up for lost time in the matter of dress and company, and spent more hours before the glass than even the belle of the season is supposed to spend there.

One of her hobbies was charity.

Money came easily now, and hers was the hand to scatter it as fast as it came.

A peddler came to the door one day with a hole in the elbow of his coat. She invited him in, seated him in the best parlor, hunted up a second-best coat of Uncle George's, which she gave him, with the advice to sell his old one to a junk-man. Then she sat and talked politics with him an hour, during which he expressed "precisely her views," and delighted her soul with the remark that she must have read extensively and studied the subject very deeply to have such a clear understanding of it.

She bought his whole stock, gave him back what she did not want, and told him to call again, which he did repeatedly.

This instance will serve as a sample of my aunt's self-denying charity.

While I was there, the house had to be painted. Two young fellows came to paint

it, both good-looking, but one as handsome as a picture. I confess I was drawn toward this young Adonis myself; but when my aunt asked him in, utter stranger though he was, and treated him to wine and politics, I was just a little disgusted.

I would not be a party to her foolishness, so I remained away from them; and when he had gone I ventured to remonstrate a little.

"My dear girl," she cried enthusiastically, "you don't know what you're talking about! Do you know who that painter is?"

"I think I have heard his name," said I dryly. "It is Thomas Watkins, is it not?"

"He only goes by that name," was the eager reply. "His real name contains a title. He is the young Lord Thomas Everheath."

My aunt looked triumphantly at me for an answer.

"Indeed!" said I, laughing. "And what may have coaxed him away from his native land, where he belonged to the upper ten, to take up so humble a position among foreigners of the lower million?"

"Oh, you need n't laugh! He told me all about it. His younger brother is engaged to be married to a young countess, whose father will not consent to the match because her betrothed has no title. In order to bring about the marriage, his lordship has come away, and spread the report at home of his own death, which would leave his brother a lord."

"And is he so short of money as to resort to a common trade for a livelihood?"

"He does that partly for fun, and partly the better to disguise himself. I knew you would be incredulous; but it's true, for he showed me a letter from his brother. The letter began with saying,—

"All's well. The wedding-day is appointed."

"Why, he is very confidential upon so short an acquaintance, is n't he?"

"Well, he says I am the first person who has taken any notice of him, or paid him any particular attention, and he thought it due to my courtesy to reveal all."

"How very appreciative! Was the letter sealed with his family coat of arms?"

"Of course not, you goose! Would n't that let the secret out to every one?"

"Take my word for it, my dear aunt, he is a guilty humbug."

"Pshaw! that is all the satisfaction one

ever gets by telling you anything. You have n't a particle of romance in your nature, so you think there is no such thing in the world."

I gave up the argument, and settled down quietly to enjoy the joke.

Day after day his lordship came to paint the house, and day after day he was feasted and entertained inside instead.

My aunt sang for him, and accompanied herself on the guitar. She could not play the piano; but Lord Tom could, and did, to the intense delight of his hostess.

He praised her wine, and flattered her, and made himself agreeable generally.

The next-door neighbors were called in to help entertain him, and were as completely gulled as my aunt.

At last the painting was done, and a few days afterward Lord Tom came to bid us good-by.

The marriage had been consummated, he said, and now he was going to return to England, where he would be hailed with joy by all but the bride's father. When he reached home, he would write and let us know.

It was so sudden, or my aunt would have given him a grand party as a farewell salute. As it was, she only said a sorrowful adieu, and "hoped to hear from his lordship before long."

When my uncle came home from Boston, where he had been during the whole passage, he was very angry. He inquired about the painter's friend, and learned that he was a stranger in the city, who had obtained temporary employment from the contractor patronized by Uncle George, but whose indolence had finally caused his discharge.

"He was a skilled workman," said the contractor; "but he was too lazy for Brooklyn, and has gone elsewhere to seek employment."

"And the idea," exclaimed Uncle George, upon returning home, "of my wife and my house being put to no better purpose than the petting and lionizing of an unprincipled adventurer!"

"Well," sighed my aunt patiently, "I suppose you'll believe me when I get his letter. He is too much of a gentleman not to write."

"If he dares to write to you, I burn his letter before it is opened!" exclaimed my uncle.

"What! if there is a stamp of nobility on the seal?"

My uncle was either nonplussed by this question, or too much disgusted to make any reply.

A month after this, however, he read aloud to us at the tea-table the following paragraph from a New-York paper:—

"At one of our Southern hotels, a young fellow, a painter by trade, has been successfully imposing himself upon the guests as a sprig of English nobility. Lord Thomas Everheath, he proclaimed himself, and stated that he had been traveling alone and in disguise all through America. His reason for remaining incognito having been removed, he appeared, he said, in his own proper person, so as to have some enjoy-

ment of American society before returning home. He kept up the delusion for nearly three weeks, during which he was lionized to his heart's content. Preparations were made for a fancy-dress ball to be given as a compliment to him; but, unfortunately, it was discovered that he was a common house and sign painter from the North. The ball came off; but ere its advent Lord Thomas Everheath had retired in disgrace from the scene."

Uncle George looked over the paper to see what effect this paragraph had upon his wife.

She was gazing calmly down upon her plate, and made no remark; but she has never since been known to lionize a house-painter.

"LOUIZY ALLEN'S BEAU."

BY ELIZABETH BIGELOW.

"Louizy Allen's got a beau, as sure as I'm a livin' woman!"

Miss Mehetabel Wiggin was peering through the closed blinds of her front parlor at two figures which were pacing up and down the shady paths of the Widow Allen's pretty garden opposite.

"Now you don't say, Hetty!"

And from the dining-room, where she had been washing up the china teacups, appeared Miss Lupira, her younger sister.

Miss Lupira reached the window in a marvelously short space of time, considering that she was an exceedingly fat and roly-poly little woman of forty.

"And we're the first to know it, Hetty! I'm sure of it. Hannah Spriggins was here this morning, and never mentioned the Allens. Now to find out who he is! I thought as like as not Louizy would catch a beau when she went to Boston. It's my opinion that 's what it was done for."

"He a'n't much to look at, that's certain," said Miss Mehetabel. "He looks old enough to be her father. His hair's as black as a coal; but it's my belief it's a wig. Lawful sakes! there he is a-kissin' of her hand right out there in the garden. The minister himself might be a-goin' by, for all they'd know, with their backs turned. Who'd think the Widow Allen would allow such goin's-on! But, there! I always had my doubts about her bein' all she'd ought to be. And Louizy is an artful little mix, with all her soft-spoken ways."

"Hetty! Hetty! there's Mr. Jarvis, the expressman, coming up the street with a big trunk. I know it's going there. Can't we stop him, and look at the name that's on it?"

And Miss Hetty's shrill voice instantly arrested the headlong course of the expressman.

"O Mr. Jarvis! I want to send a parcel to Dixmont. I will get it ready in a minute."

And, while Miss Mehetabel was preparing her bundle, Miss Lupira walked down to the gate to inquire after the health of Mr. Jarvis's family. Her little, keen blue eyes

soon discovered a bit of pasteboard on the end of the trunk, which they had decided was the property of "Louizy Allen's beau." "F. K. Warfield" was the name written on it.

This discovery was imparted to Miss Mehetabel as soon as the expressman had driven on.

"I should have been mad enough if we had n't found out, for I did n't just want to send that old carpet to Mary Grimes. We decided that it was too good, the other day, you know; but I could n't think of any other errand, to save my life. And there goes the trunk up the front stairs! I don't begrudge the carpet now; for the Widow Allen is so close-mouthed we might have been weeks finding out. F. K. Warfield! Now I'll write to Semantha to look in the Boston Directory, and find out what he does, and where he lives."

The Misses Wiggin, with their faithful maid Sally, and their ancient cat Moses, lived alone in a snug little house, and superintended the affairs of all Poppleton, from the settling of a new minister to the number of slices of bread and jam propriety allowed the little Stubbses next-door to consume in a forenoon.

Miss Mehetabel, who was tall and angular and forty-five, and of decidedly unpleasant countenance, had a regard for the opposite sex, and had not yet abandoned her hopes of entering the matrimonial state. She was always paying attention to one or more single gentlemen.

Miss Lupira, on the other hand, was very shy of the male sex, blushing and dropping her eyes if one of the audacious creatures looked at her. She was always having hair-breadth escapes from ardent admirers who followed her home, and she never entered a street-car without being stared at impertinently.

On one occasion a man went so far as to wink at her; and from this momentous occasion Miss Lupira dated all subsequent events.

"Let me see," she was wont to say, in relating events: "it happened about a month"

—or a year, as the case might be — “after the man winked at me.”

And Miss Mehetabel's suggestion, that the man might have had an affection of the eye, was received with angry scorn by Miss Lupira.

Miss Mehetabel had never enjoyed the distinction of being winked at.

The Misses Wiggin were not adored by their fellow-Poppletonians: but they were possessed of some property, and they always had the latest news to tell; on which accounts they were held in some consideration.

The Widow Allen, who lived opposite them, was very reserved, and the Misses Wiggin found no favor in her eyes.

Louise Allen, a blooming maiden of twenty, never went out of the house without being peered after by one of the spinsters, and never went to a concert or a party that one of them did n't sit up till she returned, to see who came home with her, and report it all over Poppleton before she was up the next morning.

It is not to be expected, under the circumstances, that Miss Louise would entertain a warm regard for the Misses Wiggin. So it came to pass that there was very little intercourse between the two families.

When visitors who were unknown to the spinsters made their appearance at the Widow Allen's, they at once despatched their maid Sally to borrow something, and with instructions to get all the information possible: but here the “war of races” interfered somewhat with the spinsters' plans; for Chloe, the presiding genius of the Allen kitchen, was black, and “did n't like pad-dies,” and Sally “could n't abide the nasty naygurs.”

Miss Mehetabel declared it to be her opinion, that the only reason for their keeping Chloe, “who had ‘thief’ written in her face if ever a girl had,” was because she would n't associate with other girls, and tell of the “carryings-on” they had there.

As soon as F. K. Warfield's trunk had been carried in, and the door closed upon the retreating expressman, the Misses Wiggin sought the kitchen to interview their faithful Sally.

“Sally, I want you to go straight over to Mis' Allen's, and carry that cup of vinegar you borrowed last week. And, Sally, be sure you say that Miss Louizy's beau is very handsome, and ask Chloe whether her

engagement-ring is a diamond or a pearl, or what.”

“I 'm ag'in' talkin' to naygurs at all,” said Sally.

But she went quite obediently, nevertheless.

The Misses Wiggin waited, breathless with suspense, until Sally returned.

“Sure, the sarcy naygur says he 's handsome fur them as likes his looks,” reported Sally. “And she axed me how I knew he was Miss Louizy's beau, an' I said you guessed it, an' she said then you could guess whatever was her engagement-ring.”

“It 's of no use to try to depend upon Sally and that impudent Chloe,” said Miss Mehetabel decisively. “We must find out ourselves.”

So it happened that the next day Miss Mehetabel took a twilight walk upon a street which bounded the Widow Allen's garden on the back. Miss Mehetabel had a theory that what the front of a house would not reveal about its inmates the back of it would.

And, sure enough, there was “Louizy's beau” industriously pulling weeds out of a beet-bed, and, O favoring Fates! all by himself. It was n't a wig; but he was all of forty-five, and had a bald spot as large as a silver dollar on his crown, and a queer twitching of the eyelids that reminded her of the man who winked at Lupira. He had a very marked Roman nose, and a large, ugly mouth.

“Clearly,” she mused, “'t was not his beauty did it.”

“He must have money,” she continued, after watching him, in silence, a moment longer. “I always knew that Louizy Allen was a mercenary minx.”

She approached the fence, and smiled blandly over it.

It was wasted. He did not look up.

This was too good an opportunity to be lost by bashfulness; and, fortunately, bashfulness was not one of Miss Mehetabel's failings.

“Good-evening, sir,” she remarked graciously. “A beautiful evening.”

“Louizy's beau” jumped as if he had been hit by a bullet.

“Good-evening — ah — ah — madam,” he stammered.

“Miss,” corrected Miss Mehetabel blandly. “I am Miss Mehetabel Wiggin, a neighbor. I see you like gardening. I do so love

the pursuits of agriculture myself, that I could n't help stopping to watch you."

"I like it when I bask in the beams of such radiant beauty as now shines on me," exclaimed the little gentleman,—he was very short, though very stout,—clasping his hands ecstatically.

"Is the man making fun of me?" thought Miss Mehetabel, who had not a doubt that she was very good-looking, but who had never been called if radiant beauty, that she could remember. "If he is making fun of me, that little minx, Louizy Allen, must have put him up to it."

The thought caused Miss Mehetabel to frown severely.

"Oh, pardon me! pardon me!" he exclaimed. "Do not frown upon me, and turn my sunshine into night. My emotions were too strong to be suppressed; but, oh! I trust I have not offended you beyond forgiveness. Your beauty dawned upon me so suddenly, and you remind me so strongly of one I loved years ago. Pardon me, and say that we shall meet again."

"Well, I am sure," simpered Miss Mehetabel, and dropped her eyes, like a bashful school-girl.

Surely no one could doubt his sincerity! At last she was appreciated. At last the dream of her life was realized: she had a *bona-fide* lover.

Just at this moment, most unfortunately, a door was heard to open at the house, and somebody came out.

Miss Mehetabel moved swiftly away.

"Oh, say that you will come again," the little gentleman called after her. "Let this be our trysting-place."

Miss Mehetabel went home in a dream of delight. She had captured "Louizy Allen's beau! Could there be greater happiness than that?"

For once in her life she was reticent with regard to her experiences. Miss Lupira could find out nothing, but that she had seen Louizy's beau, and he was very handsome. That was very astonishing, for Miss Mehetabel was inclined to think other women's lovers "horrid-looking creatures;" and Miss Lupira determined to see "F. K. Warfield" for herself as soon as possible.

That very night, Miss Spriggins, who was a retail dealer in millinery goods, and a wholesale dealer in gossip, came in with a bit of news.

"Mis' Lawton says that Louizy Allen

has got a beau, and his name is Frank Warfield." She's ben a-writin' to him constant ever sence she come home from Boston."

Mrs. Lawton was the postmaster's wife.

"We knew as much as that ourselves," said Miss Mehetabel, with dignity, and then made signs energetically to Miss Lupira to say no more.

Miss Lupira was much bewildered at the state of affairs, her sister's conduct was so mysterious. Never before had Miss Mehetabel manifested any reluctance to tell all she knew.

Miss Lupira took a morning stroll, before the dew was off the grass, the next morning.

She put on a white dress and a chip hat with lavender trimmings, carried a bouquet in her hand, and walked around the Widow Allen's grounds.

"Louizy's beau" was walking up and down, in a secluded corner of the garden, reading aloud, in declamatory style, from a book of poems.

The book dropped from his hand at sight of Miss Lupira, and he rushed up to the fence.

"Oh! what vision of loveliness is this that crosses my pathway?" he cried. "Oh! are you Cleopatra, or Helen the most fair? O cruel, cruel barrier that separates us twain!"

And he eyed the rather high board fence tragically.

Miss Lupira blushed, and hurried away; but, like Lot's wife of old, she soon looked back.

"Oh, do not flee, beauteous vision!" he exclaimed. "Draw near, and let me reveal the emotions which thou hast aroused in my heart."

Miss Lupira fled; but she "came that way again" the next morning. And on this occasion she went so far as to pause for a moment, and listen to the little gentleman's delightful flattery, and even to utter a few timid words herself. And, for the first time in her life, she had a secret from her sister. This was a real lover, and she could not talk about him as she could about the dreadful man who winked at her.

Miss Mehetabel took her walks in the twilight, and Miss Lupira took hers in the early morning; and they each managed to always go alone, and each was so intent on keeping her own secret that she never suspected the other of having one.

And the wooing sped apace in each case. One evening the unsuspecting little gentleman and Miss Mehetabel had listeners to their love-making. In the rustic summer-house, near them, were secreted "Louizy" and a very handsome young man. They evidently had to make very great efforts to keep from interrupting the *tete a tete* by shrieks of laughter.

"Oh, I thought I should scream! How could you help it?" said Miss Louise, leaning confidently upon the young man's arm. "To think of his asking her to marry him, and her taking it all in such dreadful earnest! And did you hear her call him 'dearest Frank'?"

"I'm afraid it won't do to let him go on so,—poor Uncle Frank! We shall have to send him back to the asylum. Your mother says he proposed to Chloe this morning! And he is destroying the garden now. He has pulled every beet out of that bed that he weeded so carefully, and set the weeds out in their places; and he has pulled up the carrots, and stuck them in again bottom side up. Poor fellow! and he was just as sensible as anybody once! See what a dreadful thing it is to be disappointed in love. You had better take care that such a thing never happens to me. I might be crazy too. I really don't know but that I should."

And young Mr. Frank Warfield looked very affectionately into his betrothed's pretty face, and forgot his uncle for a few moments in doing a little love-making on his own account.

"No, Frank," said Louise, returning to the subject: "don't send him back yet. He enjoys the garden so much; and, if he wants to destroy a few vegetables, that is very little harm. And, besides, 'it is such fun. Those two horrid old maids, who have been my *betes noir* ever since I was a little girl! No, I am not too hard on them: you would not think so if you knew how much harm their meddling and gossip have done in this town. But I don't see how he can make love to both of them, in the way he does, without their suspecting each other."

It was rather surprising; but the reason was, that each was too much absorbed in her love-affairs to think much about the other.

"Lupiry, I have something to tell you which will probably surprise you very much," announced Miss Mehetabel, with

great solemnity, on her return from one of her twilight walks. "I am going to be married."

"Mehetabel! you don't say so!"

And Miss Lupira, in her amazement, sat down on her sister's bonnet. But bonnets were a trifle to Miss Mehetabel now.

"Is it Elder Whitlow, or Ebenezer Robinson, or"—

"Neither of those, Lupiry, neither of those," dismissing all those objects of her former attentions with a majestic wave of the hand. "They were all worthy men; but I never could bring myself to favor their suits, because I could n't feel either of them to be my soul's true mate. But I have found him at last, Lupiry,—my twin soul. But he wishes our engagement to be a secret, and our marriage strictly private, on account of family reasons."

Miss Lupira started at this.

"We are to be married the first of September, and I shall have Miss Robinson here to make my trussoo right off," she added.

Miss Lupira drew a long sigh, which sounded like one of relief. A faint shadow of suspicion had crossed her mind; but this made it all right. Family reasons made it necessary for her own marriage with Mr. Warfield to be extremely private; but she was going to elope with him in a week from that day.

She tried her best to find out who Mehetabel's sweetheart was, but in vain.

She was almost appalled by the boldness of her own undertaking. Poor, timid Miss Lupira! It did seem a dreadful thing to let a man run away with one. And sometimes, in spite of her promise to her lover, she was tempted to tell Mehetabel all about it; but that worthy woman was wholly absorbed in her "trussoo," and the dressmaker was there constantly, so she had no opportunity if she had had courage.

The eventful day of the elopement came at last.

The little gentleman was to appear under Miss Lupira's window at precisely twelve o'clock. She did not propose to descend from the window, nature not having blessed her with a form adapted to such feats. She was to steal softly out of the door, and Mr. Warfield was to have a carriage in waiting.

Poor Miss Lupira! she was soon to learn that—

"The best-laid schemes of mice and men
Gang aft agley."

At dinner that day, Sally, who waited on the table, had some news to impart.

"It's a quare, crazy crayther they have across the way," she said. "The same yees thought was Miss Louizy's beau; an' sure he a'n't, but his crazy uncle, an' they a-takin' him back to the crazy-house today. An' sure it's out of his head I knew he was a wake ago, an' he tellin' me I was as beautiful as an angel wid wings, an' he'd marry me an' make me a lady if I'd run away wid him in the night-time. An' says I, 'Go away wid ye, ye crazy loon,' says I, 'an' me promised to Tim O'Flanagan these six months.' An' there's not a gurr! or a woman gone by the garden—it's not any further than that that they'll let him out, ay coorse—there's not a woman gone by but he's afther makin' love to her, an' they canna kape him at Mis' Allen's no longer, though it's quiet and country air he come for. Sure it's an engagement-ring wid a big stone in it that he gave Chloe,—an' he not above makin' love to naygurs!—an' he tellin' her they'd get married ag'in' September. An' he havin' a wife livin'!—a nice, dacint lady, they say. Well, he's a poor crazy craythur, without his wits about him, I suppose."

While Sally rattled on, Miss Mehetabel regarded her with a stony stare.

"Sally, bring me the camphire-bottle," was all she said when Sally's story was finished.

But Miss Lupira, all regardless of the presence of Miss Robinson, the dressmaker, threw up her arms, and went into a fit of hysterics.

Before she had recovered, a carriage was seen to stop at the Widow Allen's door, and the little gentleman was assisted into it.

As it rolled by the window, "Louizy Allen's beau" leaned out, and bowed and smiled affably, and even threw a kiss when he saw Miss Mehetabel.

That spinster shook her fist fiercely, in return.

"Deceitful monster!" she cried, "he's not crazy: he's a villain. He promised to marry me the first of September."

Miss Lupira recovered, at this.

"You, Mehetabel!" she exclaimed. "Oh! you only imagined it. You are always imagining such things. A woman of your age! O my dearest Frank! He really loved me. He told me I was the only woman he ever really loved. And I was going to elope with him tonight. It's all those snaky Allens!"

"Elope!" exclaimed Mehetabel. "A woman of your age! Lupiry Wiggin, I am ashamed of you."

How they settled it, nobody ever knew; for at this juncture Miss Robinson discreetly retired.

The story got abroad, and the Misses Wiggin moved away.

They are now superintending the affairs of another village, and Poppleton is at peace.

LOVE AND TABLEUX.

BY MARY FRANCES WILLIAMS.

"O waly, waly, and love is bonnie,
A little time when love is new;
But when 't is aulder it waxeth cauld,
And fades away like morning dew!"

So sung hapless Lady Barbara, and so asserted my sister Harrie, in ear splitting soprano, *accompanying herself* by vigorously beating eggs with a fork. I suspended the operation of rolling out pie-crust, to exclaim,—

"Harrie, it's really astonishing what odd songs you manage to pick up! Of all the"—

My remarks were interrupted by the entrance of Bessie, with her hands full of late autumn flowers, followed by Gilbert Dare, with a white chrysanthemum in his button-

hole and the scent of cigar-smoke perceptible about his person.

Without the cigar-smoke, it would not have been Gilbert Dare; but he did smoke such superlatively fragrant cigars that nobody objected to it. In fact, Gilbert had numbers of objectionable habits to which nobody objected. He was so frank and so genial, and always so thoroughly entertaining, that he was commonly allowed to do very much as he pleased, and availed himself of the license.

He had lately come to stay until after Thanksgiving with our nearest neighbors, the Smiths; with whom, Harrie said, he might as well have taken up his residence permanently, his visits there were so much

the reverse of angels' visits, in respect of their frequent occurrence. It was a question much discussed by the neighborhood gossips, whether his "intentions" had reference to his cousin Susie Smith, or to Bessie. Harrie and I had pretty definitely concluded that it was a case of "he could be happy with either, were t' other dear charmer away."

Gilbert was a handsome fellow, and marvelously agreeable; but we used to prophesy that he would be an "old bach," owing to the difficulty of settling his affections upon one particular lady-love long enough to marry her.

If there was any one thing, besides love-making, that Gilbert had a special genius for, it was the getting up and carrying on successfully of private theatricals and all manner of "entertainments." Therefore we considered it particularly fortunate that he should be at hand to help us with our tableau party for Thanksgiving night. He and Bessie had charge of the costumes and decorations, assisted by Susie Smith and her big half-brother, Ben Bradshaw; while Harrie and I undertook the cookery. Necessity and long experience had made me an excellent plain cook; and as for Harrie, I would defy any *Paris confectioner* to excel her in the manufacture of sweets and dainties.

It was Thanksgiving morning, and we were in a hurry to get the last of our good things into the oven; so we only stopped for a word or two with Bessie and Gilbert, as they passed through the kitchen, carrying their chrysanthemums into the front room, where Ben could be heard hammering away at the drop-curtain which he was hanging in front of the doorway of our spare bedroom.

I don't know how we should have managed without Ben Bradshaw, tall, broad-shouldered Ben, to erect the stage and hang the draperies, and evolve impossible "properties" out of barrel-hoops and bits of deal board; indeed, I don't know what we should ever have done without him. It was not alone in the play-days of life that he stood ready to help us; nobody knew, or would ever know from him, how much that great, loyal-hearted fellow had done, and was always doing, for we three "lone and lorn" young women. We knew well enough what reward he hoped for; but we never fancied for a moment that he would

have been a shade less kind to us if Bessie had not been so beautiful.

Our tableau party was rather an impromptu affair, but we enjoyed it all the more for that. We had a very pleasant set of friends, and they were all at their pleasantest that evening. Only Gilbert Dare was a little sulky because Bessie and Ben Bradshaw went off down street together, at the last moment, after something which had been forgotten, and were gone longer than he thought entirely necessary. He pretended not to see them when they came in, making a great show of devoting himself to Mrs. Revere, a pretty widow who was rather setting her cap at him.

However, when he perceived that Bessie did not care a straw, he abandoned the widow, and devoted himself with great zeal to the tableaux; and presently he had the satisfaction of being called upon to construct a "vine-covered arbor" under Bessie's supervision; that article being required to complete a romantic love-scene.

This necessitated a visit to the woodshed, where the requisite materials were to be obtained, and the requisite pounding performed. Anybody who had chanced to look into the woodshed, some ten minutes later, would have beheld Bessie seated on an inverted bushel basket, holding a paper of tacks, while Gilbert knelt before her and hammered in a desultory manner at a curious contrivance of laths and evergreen boughs, destined to represent the "arbor."

This piece of handiwork might have been finished in half the time which Gilbert devoted to its construction, had he bestowed upon it as much attention as he was giving up to his companion; who seemed to be very little gratified by his interest, however. (Don't ask me how I came to know all about it; it is an author's business to know these things.)

In plain words, Gilbert was trying to propose to Bessie, and Bessie was dodging the question in a manner most exasperating to his feelings.

"Bessie," said he, making his fifth attempt to come squarely to the point, "Bessie, what should you think of me for a husband?"

"I never thought of you in that character," demurely answered Bessie. "I always said you would certainly be an old bach!"

"I shall not, then!" retorted Gilbert shortly.

"Well, if you are thinking seriously of matrimony, I have one piece of advice to offer you."

"Well?" said Gilbert, with interest. "What is your advice, Bessie?"

"The same as old Weller's!" laughed Bessie. "Beware of the widows!"

"Don't trifle with me, Bessie!"

Gilbert said this rather sharply, and emphasized it by pounding vigorously at the arbor. Bessie stole a side-glance at his handsome face, and saw that his eyes were beginning to flash and his lips to tremble. He was evidently getting angry; and Miss Bessie became discreetly silent.

Presently, having completed the arbor, Gilbert spoke again, rising to his feet and standing before her, with a very determined air and expression.

"Bessie, you know perfectly well what I mean; and I should suppose you could give me a straightforward answer to a straightforward question. I ask you" —

"Oh, don't, Gilbert!" exclaimed Bessie, rising also, with sudden trepidation. "Please do not ask me anything!"

But Gilbert persisted; he thought he had the advantage now.

"I ask you to be my wife. Will you marry me, Bessie?"

Bessie colored deeply.

"The fact is, Gilbert," said she, "I am engaged to Ben Bradshaw."

"The deuce you are!"

"Mr. Dare!"

"Oh, you need not look precise, Miss Bessie!" cried Gilbert, with rising wrath. "Flora told me, only last night, that you were free."

"So I was, last night," rejoined Bessie. "I've only been engaged about an hour."

"Just my luck!" groaned Gilbert. "Why did n't I speak this morning! I was on the point of it, when we were getting those chrysm — whatever — you-call-ems!"

Bessie laughed at his exasperated tone.

"I would not waste any regrets upon that, Gilbert," she said. "If it is any consolation to you, I can assure you that it would not have made the least difference, for I have liked Ben this long time."

Gilbert answered not a word, but he looked very disconsolate, as he shouldered the "vine-covered arbor" and followed Bessie to the house. At the door, she

paused, and with her hand upon the latch, turned around to him, and said, in tones which sounded half-sympathizing, half-admonitory and wholly kind, —

"You have done a rather foolish thing, Gilbert, for you must have seen how matters stood between Ben and I. But if you take my advice, you can do better."

"What can I do?" asked Gilbert dolefully.

"Stoop down, and I'll whisper."

He bent his head, obediently, and she said, in his ear, —

"You'd better ask Susie!"

Gilbert looked at her, doubtfully, but her eyes met his in perfect seriousness; and after a moment of profound silence, he ejaculated, —

"By Jove, I will! and there's my hand upon it."

Bessie warmly clasped his hand, and her eyes sparkled, as she opened the door, saying, —

"That's right, Gilbert; if we can't be lovers, we can be the best of friends."

"Which is very much the wiser of the two," coolly remarked Harrie, standing directly before them as they entered the kitchen. "Lovers are always plenty enough, but you don't find a friend every day!"

"My goodness! Harrie!" faltered Bessie, in dismay; while Gilbert turned red and laughed uncomfortably.

"Oh, I'll never tell!" said Harrie. "I was just going out to see if you were ever coming along with that arbor," she continued; "but it is n't much of an arbor, is it? I don't believe the question can be successfully popped under that diminutive concern."

"The question was popped with very poor success while it was making!" answered Gilbert, with a funereal grin.

"Ah! this is a vale of tears," said Harrie; "but hope springs perpetual, you know. Better luck next time, Gilbert."

"I hope so!" and Gilbert glanced significantly at Bessie.

"Harrie," said he, "won't you hold the door open, while I escort this arbor into the front room?"

"You'll have to take it through the hall into the property-room. Flora is clearing out the front rooms for the audience," said Harrie, as she opened the hall-door of the spare bedroom, otherwise "the property-room," where a number of the prospective

actors were assembled, surrounded by a small chaos of incongruous articles which had been collected there to serve as "prop-erties."

Gilbert marched in with the arbor, which was received with general disapproval, on account of its small size; but he explained that this was owing to a scarcity of laths, and expressed it as his opinion that any reasonably minded pair of lovers could manage to dispose of "the question" under an arbor of that size. The twinkle in Harrie's eyes, as he said this, made him resolve to be very chary of jokes at her expense, for some time to come.

"Gilbert," said Bessie, "you and Harrie are to appear in the first scene; we will call it 'One Hundred Years Ago.' They found the costumes up in the attic; and you must put them on at once, for it is time to open the exhibition. The kitchen bedroom is the ladies' dressing-room; and you gentlemen can take this great closet."

"All right," said Gilbert, with an exaggeration of his usual gayety; "let's have the toggery. By Jove! we've got rubbish enough here to set up a first-class junk-shop! Is that my rig? Knee-breeches and powdered wig and—O Jupiter! what stunning shoe-buckles!"

"And O Jupiter! what stunning sleeves!" recklessly supplemented Harrie, surveying her own costume.

"Why, Harrie!" reproved Bessie. "Do stop your nonsense now, and get dressed. Flora, where are those cards?" And Bessie hastened away to arrange the scene, while Ben Bradshaw presented himself at the front-room door, and announced that "the show was about to commence."

The audience bustled forward to take their seats; and in the property-room arose a hurry of confusion rather more than twice confounded.

"Where's my guitar? Did you ever see a Troubadour without a guitar?"

"I never saw a Troubadour; but I believe they carry harps, don't they? Harrie's got a banjo; where is it, Harrie?"

"Oh, my beating heart! a Troubadour with a banjo!"

"Are these my habiliments?"

"No; those belong to 'The Pirate's Bride.'"

"Ben, you never can pop the question in that little arbor; your head will be four feet above the top!"

"I say, who would have believed Ben could look so silly!"

"That's the proper way to look; when you're in Turkey, you must gobble!"

"Did anybody bring down that old hobby-horse from the attic?"

"Yes, here it is; behold this gallant charger!"

"My kingdom for a horse!"

"But thereby hangs no tail!"

"And not much ears; but he'll do, with a pinch of salt."

"Hollo, Gilbert! First appearance of Gilbert as a gentleman of ye olden time."

"Good gracious, what a figure!"

"Let a fellow alone, when he's dressed up! Harrie, how do I look in this wig?"

"It overcomes you like a summer's cloud. Flo, which is the right side up of this cap? I don't believe it goes on this way."

"Gilbert! Harrie! if you are ready, come and pose," called Bessie. "The audience is getting impatient."

A few moments later, the impatient audience was gratified, as Ben drew up the drop-curtain, showing the tableau of a couple in costumes of "one hundred years ago," playing whist at a little mahogany card-table; represented by Harrie, looking very saucy and charming in a gorgeous old brocade, stiff with threads of silver, her arms quite lost in the "stunning" sleeves, and her pretty face encircled by the dingy frills of a quaint lace cap; and Gilbert, looking very ridiculous in knee-breeches and a battered old wig, which had been worn by some great-grandfather of our family.

This scene was received with great applause and merriment; and it was followed by a variety of love-scenes and tragic episodes, in all of which the comic element was rather prominent, owing to the incongruous costumes and startling attitudes of the actors; who looked supernaturally solemn in all the love-scenes, and appeared much inclined to laugh in the midst of the high tragedy.

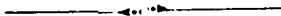
After the tableaux, and while the company was doing unlimited justice to my special part of the evening's entertainment, I chanced to witness a suggestive little episode between Gilbert and Susie. He was holding a plate, from which she regaled herself with Harrie's choicest bon-bons; at the same time bending low his handsome head, to whisper in her ear some of the extravagantly sentimental gallantries which

he had such a talent for whispering; but Susie knew him too well to trust in their sincerity.

"I wish you would n't be so silly, Gilbert," I heard her exclaim. "You say those things to every girl you know, and you never mean them!" she added severely,

but stealing a wistful glance at him from under her drooping eye-lashes.

I did not catch Gilbert's answer; but if he was not in earnest then, he became so afterward; and he must have convinced Susie of his sincerity, for they were married that winter.



LOVE AMONG THE ICE-FIELDS.

BY W. H. MACY.

I hear that Tom Dawson was ship-keeper on board one of the whalers lost last season in the great Polar basin, near Point Barrow; and that he remained by the ship, preferring to take his chances in these hyperborean regions rather than attempt the seemingly desperate—though, as it proved, successful—journey over land and ice to seek safety on board more fortunate ships. Tom is an old stager in those Polar seas; and, from all that I can learn from those rescued and brought to San Francisco, I have a shrewd suspicion that he has returned to his first love.

It is fifteen years since Tom Dawson and I were shipmates in the "Braganza;" and he then told me that he had been up north every summer since 1849, but had never penetrated so far as he wished to go, which was to a bay in latitude seventy-four north, near Point Barrow.

I was curious to know what particular object he had in view, that he should thus persevere, year after year, in trying to reach that far-away place.

"Why," asked Dawson, "is n't it natural that a man should want to see his wife?"

"His wife!" I echoed, in amazement. "Why, yes, of course it's natural; but what do you mean by that?"

"My wife is up there somewhere, I suppose. For the last twelve seasons I have been sailing out of the Sandwich Islands by the cruise, coming up here in the Arctic every summer, and all with the hope of again meeting my little Agnes."

"Agnes?" I again repeated. "Agnes what or who?"

"Why, Agnes Dawson," he answered coolly, "since, as I told you, she is my wife. I have seldom told the circumstance to any of my shipmates; for they are too much inclined to laugh at me, and call me a romantic fool: but I shall come up into these seas every year as long as I am able to do it; and, if I ever find my wife, I shall go with her and stay with her, if I have to fight my way out of the ship, and fight again after I get on shore. I think I have

confidence enough in you to tell you all the particulars; and, after having heard the story, you shall judge for yourself how big a fool I am."

And this is the substance of the story which Tom Dawson told to me during our night-watches.

When Captain Roys, in the "Superior," of Sag Harbor, passed through Behring's Straits in the summer of 1848, and made a very successful whaling season, it was generally believed that his was the only vessel visiting the Arctic Ocean that year. But, according to the story told me by Tom, the little bark "Mongolian," on board which he held the berth of ordinary seaman, sailed from Sydney, Australia, in the early part of that year, on a voyage which was secret from all but her captain and chief officer.

It was understood by Tom and others of the crew, when they signed the shipping articles, that the vessel was to make a trading voyage among the Micronesian Islands in the lower latitudes of the Pacific, and would extend her cruise to Vancouver's Island or other British ports on the northwest coast of America. There was nothing about the "Mongolian" or her outfit that indicated any special preparations for a voyage to the icy seas, and Tom assured me that he certainly should not have joined her crew if he had known or even guessed her real destination.

After touching at various islands in the Pacific, the bark held her course steadily northward; and, instead of approaching the west coast of America at the point expected by the crew, she steered through one of the passages among the Aleutian Chain, and made her first landfall near Cape St. Thaddeus.

Tom and his shipmates, indignant at the deception practiced upon them, entered their protest; but the captain, calling all hands aft, explained that he intended to explore for information concerning new whaling-grounds in the far north, and also to ascertain if a good trade might not be carried on with the wandering tribes of Esquimaux

for furs and walrus-ivory. The crew were promised extra wages and more grog, their remonstrances were all overruled, and they returned to their duty.

The "Mongolian" then proceeded on her voyage through Behring's Straits, entering the Polar basin, as appears by Tom's statements, some days in advance of the date given in the log-book of Captain Roys. A good dicker was carried on, from time to time, with little parties of Indians who came out in their skin-boats; and, the season proving a very open one, the little bark skirted the ice-fields away up to the vicinity of Point Barrow, arriving there late in August.

A large party of natives were found encamped here at a favorable location for carrying on a trade; and the anchor was let go in a convenient depth at two miles' distance from the land, for the whole sea is but a shallow basin, affording anchorage anywhere.

But, the night following, a gale came on from the westward, forcing the ice in toward the land until the bark was surrounded and hemmed in by the impassable barrier.

But she was not at first supposed to be in immediate danger, and it was hoped that a change of wind and weather might soon operate to release her from the icy fetters. The wind, however, continued for three weeks in the same quarter; and more and more ice kept pressing down before it, making the situation each day more perilous. Hope merged into deep anxiety, and anxiety into despair, until at last the captain decided to abandon the bark to her fate, and seek safety for himself and those under his command by making a journey down the coast to some Russian settlement. The season was drawing to a close, and the signs heralding the approach of an early winter were already to be observed.

The stock of provisions on board was not sufficient to have lasted the whole crew more than half way through the inclement season, even had there been a reasonable hope of preserving the vessel herself from destruction.

But of this there was no prospect; for it seemed that any considerable increase of wind, causing a commotion among the ice, must certainly break her up, and probably destroy the lives of all who might be on board of her at the moment.

The Esquimaux had all the time been

very friendly to the ice-bound mariners; but to attempt to quarter the whole crew of eighteen men upon them for the winter was not for a moment to be thought of. They were so poor themselves that they barely picked up a meagre subsistence, wandering from place to place, like the Bedouins of the desert.

When it was finally decided to abandon, Tom Dawson, and his chum, Jack Gilbert, declared their intention of taking their chance of remaining by the bark, living either on board or among the Indians, rather than incur the toils and risks of the journey over ice and land which the main body were about to undertake.

The captain raised no objection to this; and the two, taking an affectionate leave of their shipmates, remained behind, with a strong presentiment upon all that they would never meet again in this world.

Taking the two boats with them, sixteen men set forward over the ice, heading directly to the southward, but keeping as near the coast as circumstances would permit.

Tom and Gilbert watched them as long as they could be seen from the bark's mast-head, and felt the entire loneliness of their condition all the more keenly when their comrades were no longer to be seen. But each party had made their own election; and those sixteen men were never heard of more, having no doubt all perished miserably in some way known only to Omniscience.

The party had taken what provisions they could well carry with them; but enough remained on board the "Mongolian" to last two men for more than a year. Gilbert and Tom were in some doubt as to the best manner of preserving their stock: for if they, with the help of their Esquimaux friends, could carry it on shore, it would be quite impossible to guard against theft and waste; for these people, despite their general friendliness, had an irresistible propensity to pilfer even things which they did not really want, and were, besides, improvident even to recklessness. On the other hand, if the bark were destroyed, with all the provisions on board, they would be in a miserable plight, even if they escaped with their lives; for they would be restricted to the nauseous diet of the Esquimaux, and short commons even at that.

But for the present they decided to let all

remain as it was, and to live chiefly on board, keeping aloof, as far as possible, from the Indians. Some of the latter, however, came on board every day, and of course took greater liberties, now that there were only two seamen left, than they had when all hands were on board. Though not at all hostile, they were thus quite troublesome.

The weather and wind continued much the same for another week; but, at the end of that period, an easterly breeze set in, and the masses of ice were forced off shore, thus relieving the vessel from the pressure. Three or four days of easterly weather were sufficient to move away the barrier, and leave a strip of clear water several miles in width along the coast.

But it was quite impossible for our two adventurers to work and handle a bark of two hundred tons in such a manner as to take her back into the Pacific; while the Esquimaux, even had they been willing to assist in such a voyage, were entirely useless as seamen. Besides, the view from the mast-head showed such immense bodies of ice to the southward that it was evident that all hope of escape in that direction would be effectually barred as soon as a few miles' progress had been made.

The idea was at once given up; but, with the aid of the Indians, the anchor was weighed, and the ship worked into a small haven beyond a bend of the shore, somewhat to the northward of the former anchorage. Here the anchor was again let go, within half a mile from the shore; as it was thought to be the position which held out the best promise of safety.

Tom and his partner, having now done all that could be done, awaited the progress of the season, determined, in the event of any great movement of the ice, to get clear of the bark in time, before she should be crushed or be forced on shore.

The Esquimaux set about building their winter village at the head of the haven, within convenient distance of the vessel; the village consisting of only three huts, with a population of about thirty souls.

When the wind again changed, it came quite fresh from the northwest, and the sight of the advancing fields of ice was fearful to behold. The preparations for abandonment were hastily made, and a part of the provisions was being transferred to the small boat and the native *baidars*, to be car-

ried on shore, when an unlooked-for circumstance occurred, which proved the salvation of the "Mongolian," and gave our heroes at least a respite from destruction by shipwreck, which a moment before appeared inevitable.

Among the advance guard of the icy masses was one particularly large berg or floating island,—large in extent or area, but of no great height. This berg, moving on with the rest in full career, was suddenly brought to a stand by striking aground directly at the mouth of the little bay, which passage it almost completely blocked up. The other smaller masses, being thus effectually checked, recoiled from the shock, grinding upon each other, and were swept away to the southward, so that only smaller pieces found their way past the great natural breakwater thus formed by the stranded berg.

The Esquimaux greeted this phenomenon with wild shouts, and declared, with every kind of pantomime they could make use of, that the bark was safe for the season.

And the event proved that they were right; for the next day the weather became wintry, with a sudden accession of cold, and, before Tom and his crony had completed their arrangements for making themselves comfortable on board, the young ice had begun to form in the smooth basin of the little bay. In a few more days it was strongly frozen over; and the "Mongolian" lay snugly and securely docked, with no apprehension of any immediate peril to the vessel herself.

I will not tire the reader with a description of their life in winter quarters, such as has been so well and so minutely described in the narratives of the several Arctic explorers. Of course our two men, having a vessel not specially fitted for wintering in the regions of eternal ice, were put to a thousand make-shifts and rude contrivances; yet they managed, not only to exist, but to keep themselves tolerably comfortable.

The Indians, had they been so disposed, might easily have taken possession of the vessel and all she contained. But they showed no such disposition, and continued to make peaceful visits to her every day when the mercury rose high enough to allow of human beings venturing into the open air at all.

There was one among them, who, it soon

appeared, was always a welcome guest in the snug little after-cabin of the "Mongolian," and who was destined to wield a strange and powerful influence over my wayward shipmate, Tom Dawson.

There was only one young woman among the tribe, who was known by the euphonious name of Aggalootka. She was the daughter of old Agkaloot, who might be called a prominent man in his own circle: for at least the prominence of his own cheek-bones could not be denied; and he was, besides, a shade dirtier than most of his neighbors. Although he was a widower, he appeared to entertain very little affection for his only child, who had something exceptional about her, and did not excel in those gifts and accomplishments which would tend to make her a belle in the estimation of her own countrymen.

According to Tom's own statement, which is the only available evidence bearing upon the case, Aggalootka was really pretty; but due allowance must be made for the partiality of a lover. A pretty woman, in any sense of the phrase as used by civilized men, is certainly a *rara avis* among the Western Esquimaux; for, as a rule, they are even less prepossessing in appearance than the men. In most of the specimens whom I have met, the softening down of the features seemed to give to the little nose the effect of a mere pimple lying deep down in a valley between two mountainous cheeks. And, as everything about the dress, movements, and manners of these people is at the very antipodes of grace or good taste, it would seem that Aggalootka must have been an unworthy representative of her own race if she possessed charms to so infatuate an intelligent Englishman like Tom Dawson.

However, be that as it may, Tom, in his strange quarters, isolated from civilization, did actually conceive for this Esquimau maiden a passion which has influenced and colored his whole subsequent life. She was a frequent visitor to the cozy little cabin of the "Mongolian," and often shared the rations of the two seamen, thereby conferring a strange kind of happiness upon Tom, while it must be admitted that her company was rather a bore to the less susceptible Gilbert.

According to the description given of his character by Tom, his shipmate had, in common with the Esquimaux, the faculty

of being able to sleep whenever he chose, and thus while away a great portion of the winter in a torpid state, like a polar bear. It was while Jack thus enjoyed his somnolence, that the lovers passed the most delightful hours, Tom teaching English words to Aggalootka, while at the same time he improved his own knowledge of the Indian jargon by way of exchange. But the language of tenderness requires not words as a medium of exchange; and in this case heart speaks to heart, and eye to eye.

In vain did Gilbert, during his waking hours, ridicule and satirize all this nonsense, as he termed it. Aggalootka was certainly touched with a new sensation; such as she had never felt toward any of the hunters among her own people; and Tom Dawson, imprisoned in almost total darkness, and smothered in furs, was, alas! over head and ears in love with the little Esquimau maiden.

Matters had progressed into this stage, when one day the patriarch, Agkaloot, went out alone to hunt the walrus, and did not return. There were strange wallings and mourning rites all the next day around the air-hole in the ice near which his spear had been found; but the frigid element refused to give up its dead.

Here was a new trouble for Aggalootka; for her father, though never at all demonstrative in his affection for her, had always left her inclinations free in the matter of marriage, and had sustained her in her steady refusal to espouse Gurjak, the ugliest and most disgusting man of the tribe, and the most persistent of suitors for her hand.

As soon as the days of mourning for the lost brave were over, these persecutions were renewed in a manner showing that Gurjak felt his power now and her helplessness.

Aggalootka, rendered miserable by her would-be lover's hateful overtures, sought the "Mongolian"'s cabin more than ever: in fact, she might almost be said to live there.

Tom, albeit his course might be fraught with personal danger, was happy enough in feeling himself the protector and champion of persecuted innocence; and Aggalootka was invested with even new beauties in his eyes.

It was not long before he resolved upon the bold plan of making her his own wife,

and living or dying with her; though he knew that such a course must involve the greatest risk to himself.

It did not take long to come to an understanding with the young lady herself. She was ready to incur any risk to escape the suit of the detested Gurjak.

The preliminaries were quickly arranged; and Aggalootka came on board the bark the same night, accompanied by two old women, hideously ugly, who were her fast friends, and fully in the secret. A boy was also brought along, without whose assistance the marriage ceremony could not be completed.

The ceremonies, as practiced among this tribe, were very simple and unique. Both Tom and his bride-elect were anointed with rancid whale-oil; the anointing being performed for Tom by the two old women, and for Aggalootka by Jack Gilbert and the boy. The couple were then lashed together, back to back, with thongs of walrus-hide, one of these thongs going round both their necks so as to pull the backs of their heads into close contact. A sack or bag made of the semi-translucent intestine of a whale was then pulled over both their heads; and, thus confined, they remained while the old women and the boy repeated the marriage service, whatever that might be, in their native tongue.

When this was concluded, the happy twain were released from their bonds; and having embraced, and rubbed their noses together, the ceremony was declared to be complete.

"It may be all satisfactory to your wife, Tom, as far as she is concerned," said the astute Gilbert, "and she has done all right according to her knowledge and gifts; but it strikes me that the Episcopal Church of England ought to have a finger in the pie, for your sake, Tom, at least. Stand by, now, to repeat after me what I'm going to read."

And Jack produced an old soiled book, from which he read off the whole marriage service; Tom making the proper responses, and using a brass ring, which was large enough for the bride to put two fingers into at once.

"I've no church authority," continued Gilbert, "and perhaps there's still something about the splice that is n't quite ship-shape; but I've done the very best I could, and I now pronounce you, Thomas Dawson,

and you, Aggie or Agnes Lootka, to be man and wife, so far as you can be made so in these heathenish regions."

As he spoke these last words, a stir was heard overhead; and a moment later there was an impatient series of knocks at the cabin-door.

Tom drew his wife to his side, while his shipmate undid the fastenings, and confronted the enraged Gurjak and two other dirty braves.

A word from one of the old women assured the disappointed suitor that he had arrived too late; and he turned away, muttering what were supposed to be threats of dire vengeance. But he had not many partisans among his own people, aside from the two men who came with him. Most of the tribe, including all the women and the better of the men, were in sympathy with Aggalootka, and were rather glad that she had been married to the stranger instead of being sacrificed to Gurjak.

And so Tom and Aggie received their friends, who for a few days made their congratulatory calls, and then fairly settled down to the routine of housekeeping in the cabin of the "Mongolian."

The dark Arctic night wore slowly away, with little to break its dreadful monotony; and the milder days of spring at length arrived, with indications that the icy fetters around the stout little vessel must soon be broken.

It was no longer necessary to keep housed closely all the time; and our two seamen often took long tramps on the ice, for the excitement of hunting seals or walruses as well as for much-needed exercise, for in their confined quarters they had been in constant fear of that dread disease, the scurvy.

Sometimes Tom and his active little wife went out together, for Aggie was uneasy at being left behind; and on such occasions the revengeful rival was often seen lurking not far from them: but as Tom always carried his loaded gun, of which not only Gurjak, but all the tribe, stood in wholesome fear, as something mysterious, they were safe from any attack by their hideous enemy.

But on one occasion, when, according to the calendar kept on board, the season had advanced well into the month of May, the young couple had strayed away out nearly to the mouth of the bay, where the great

berg still held itself like an immense barricade across the entrance, and obstructed all view of the still ice-bound sea outside.

The ice upon which they walked was not as smooth and level as that in which the ship was docked, broken and irregular, forming in many places hummocks of considerable size and height, with air-holes at frequent intervals.

Aggie, nimble as a fawn, had run on in advance of her husband, and was for the moment hidden from his sight by the intervening hillocks of ice.

Tom had left his gun standing against one of these, and walked a few steps to the edge of an air-hole, stopping to peer down into its depths. While thus engaged, and abstracted for an instant from all around him, he was startled by a wild shriek, and, jumping up, was just in time to step aside, thus saving himself from being pushed bodily over by the fierce Gurjak, while his swift-footed wife, rushing upon the would-be murderer before he had time to retreat from the verge of the opening, pushed with all the strength of her two hands, and threw herself backward upon the ice, while Gurjak, losing his footing, toppled over down into the hole.

Tom Dawson, spite of his gratitude for his own deliverance, was quite horror-stricken at the tragedy, and ran to look down, hoping something might be done to save even the man who had intended for him the same fate which had recoiled upon himself. But little Aggie pulled him away from the spot, putting her hand upon his mouth to indicate that he was always to keep the secret, and, thrilled with joy at having been in time to save her husband's life, appeared to breathe more freely and to feel happier than at any other time since the day of her marriage.

There was no one in sight at the time; and, if they kept their own counsel, the fate of Gurjak must forever remain a mystery to his people.

It was with a heavy heart, however, and an abstracted air, that Tom returned to the vessel; but the secret was safe with the two, and was never revealed even to Jack Gilbert.

The mourning rites followed as in the case of Tom's father-in-law, old Agkaloot; and then the lost man appeared to be forgotten.

The sunshine of spring was now growing

more and more powerful day by day; and in a short time the distant rumbling sounds, as well as the view from the mast-head, gave evidence that the great ice-floes in the offing were breaking up and drifting away southward. The spring tides lifted the great berg from the bottom, and swung it away from its position like an immense gate upon its hinges, while the moist appearance of the level ice in the haven, with the sight of here and there an opening crack, betokened a speedy release of the "Mongolian" from her winter quarters.

Our two Englishmen took counsel together upon their future movements; for the crisis of their fate seemed to be now approaching.

"Surely, you've no idea, Tom, of taking up your abode among these filthy, blubber-eating savages?" said Jack Gilbert, who, with the advent of milder weather, had shaken off all his apathy, and was now the brisk, wide-awake British seaman, equal to any emergency. "Eh, Tom? Don't tell me, old fellow, you'll turn savage yourself?"

"No, no," Tom answered: "such a life as that is not to be thought of for a moment if it can be avoided. And yet," he continued, with a fond look at his wife, who sat in a corner of the cabin, devouring walrus-flesh raw with all the gusto of her ancestors, "what else can we do? We never can work the bark even if we could get her outside the bay there. She would go to pieces in the ice, and there we should perish unknown and unsung, as the phrase is. That would be rather worse than the blubber-eating life. Then our old jolly-boat is in a condition that she can hardly be kept afloat, and so rotten that she is n't worth repairing. We could n't do much with her."

"Of course we could n't," answered Jack dogmatically. "She is n't good for anything in these waters anyhow. We must have an Arctic boat made of skins,—an *oomiak*. The season has got along where there is a decent, regular change of night and day; though the darkness is short, and is fast growing shorter. Tonight we must steal an *oomiak*,—there are two of them lying out here in the ice, half way down the bay,—launch her out into the open sea, and be off before daylight comes."

"But can we do that without being stopped?" asked Tom doubtfully.

"I think we can," said Gilbert. "There 'll be no Indians out tonight after the haze settles down, because the ice is n't safe, and they're afraid it will break clear across the bay. My only fear is, that they 'll haul their *oomiaks* ashore when they come in; but I hope they may risk 'em out another night. We must take what provisions we can lug away with us, and, when that's all gone, trust to luck for what we can kill. We shall be going south, into milder weather; and we must keep away out into the middle of the basin, and have nothing to do with any straggling parties of savages so long as we can manage to feed ourselves. We can find our way down through the straits in ten or twelve days if we don't founder at sea. But, if a gale comes on, we may find it safest to make for the shore, and land somewhere."

"And where do you expect to bring up finally?" inquired Dawson, still rather dubious.

"Well, there again we must trust to luck, which is better than the life of a blubber-eater. We may fall in with a vessel, or coast away down the shore till we reach some Russian settlement. Perhaps our chance of that will be better over on the Asiatic side of the sea; but I don't care which side it is, so that we fetch out somewhere."

"And, now, about Aggie?" said Tom anxiously.

"Can't you leave her behind?" asked Jack. "I know 't is n't the thing to separate man and wife; but, really, is n't it best for all parties in this case? Suppose we get back to civilization, what could you ever do with a wife like that? She would be a regular-built elephant on your hands. She 'd be very unhappy, and so would you too. I don't doubt that you love her, Tom. I used to laugh at that; but I don't now. Still, for her own sake, as well as for yours, she had better be left behind, among her own people."

Tom considered a minute, and then answered very decidedly, —

"No: Aggie shall not be left here, unless it be by her own request. It shall be as she chooses; and I know she will choose to go with us. You forget, Jack, how useful she can be to us in the *oomiak*. If we perish on the way, she and I will at least die together; and, if we reach civilization once more, — Well, never mind: I 'll meet these

difficulties when I get to them. So my wife goes with me, to live or die, unless she herself chooses to do otherwise."

Tom could not make up his mind to tell his shipmate of the new tie of gratitude which bound him to Aggalootka as the preserver of his life. But Gilbert, although still vexed at Tom's foolishness, as he considered it, saw that further argument would be useless.

That very night, while the Esquimaux were all in their huts, and everything was quiet on shore, the two men and the faithful woman, laden with provisions and other necessary articles, abandoned the "Mongolian" to her fate, and made their way to the *oomiak*.

Before they were missed by those on shore, their light craft was away out in the Polar basin, threading her way rapidly between the floating masses of ice, and heading southward toward Christian lands.

The voyage was a hard and trying one, and at various times they were obliged to make a landing, owing to heavy weather coming on, and to pass two or three days on shore. But the two were both young, hardy, and resolute, and inspired with the hope of a return to the world of warmth and life; and Tom's wife, with no particular aim save to follow and share his fortunes, and with no idea of any world but the frozen regions between Behring's Straits and Point Barrow, was nevertheless quite at home in the *oomiak* as well as at the landing-places along these desolate shores, and was ever full of shifts and resources. Indeed Jack Gilbert himself admitted that she was worth a dozen white men under these circumstances, and had no doubt she could have taken the boat and made the same voyage alone much better than he and Tom could have made it without her company.

It was nearly a month before the party reached and passed the Dromide Islands, which stand like sentinels in the gateway of the straits, and their *oomiak*, still making its devious course between the lumps of floating ice, emerged upon the broad Pacific Ocean.

No words can picture the astonishment and joy of Tom and Jack at the sight of five ships at different points along the southern horizon. They knew nothing of the successful whaling cruise of the "Superior," or how the tidings brought back by her sent a whole fleet of American whalers

to follow on her track in the summer of 1840.

The little Esquiman woman, Aggalootka, was an object of special attention and interest at Honolulu after her arrival there in the fall. Such a specimen had never been known to reach a tropical climate before; and indeed she was utterly unfitted to flourish in any such latitude. Despite the best intentions of Tom Dawson, it was soon plainly evident that his transplanted blossom was likely to wither. In the midst of luxuriance, in a land where Nature had been most bountiful in dispensing her gifts, poor Aggie pined for a speedy return to the eternal ice and snow, the utter barrenness and desolation, on which she had been rooted and reared to womanhood. It was not that she loved Tom less, but that she loved her native soil more. If he would go back with her, and dwell in her Arctic home, her happiness would be complete; but go back she must, or speedily die.

No one was more sensible of this than her husband, and he was all impatience for the arrival of the spring fleet of whalers on their way to the northern cruising grounds, that he might secure a passage for himself and his drooping wife.

But meanwhile he could not afford to be idle; and so, placing his wife in good and comfortable quarters on shore, he took an affectionate leave of her, and shipped for a sperm-whaling cruise between seasons, expecting to return to Honolulu early in the spring.

But, as the captain of a whaler cruises under a sort of roving commission, this one saw fit to alter his plans, and make his stop at another port; so that the husband and wife did not meet again, as Tom had intended.

So, after waiting, with hope deferred, till it was definitely ascertained that the "Omega" would not return until fall, a passage for the poor, enfeebled woman was secured on board one of the last ships which left Honolulu in 1850, bound direct to Behring's Straits.

Tom went in the same direction; but, as whales were found plenty in the Anadir Sea, his ship did not pass through into the Arctic Ocean at all; and he returned with a rich cargo, and his pockets well filled, but with his wife entirely lost to him. He only learned that she had been landed at a little settlement at the mouth of Kotzebue Sound,

where there were some Esquimaux who had known her. She was in good health, or at least was fast recovering her strength and spirits, when she was put on shore; the cold, bracing air of the high latitudes having worked like magic in restoring her. She had been overjoyed to return to her old way of life, the only drawback to her happiness being the separation from her husband. But she hoped, that, as she could not live in a warm climate, Tom might some day come to her.

And so it was, that Tom Dawson, up to the time when he and I broke bread together in the "Braganza," had visited the Polar whaling-grounds every year, hoping to meet his first and only love. Not being able to get up an expedition on his own account, he could only ship in a whaler, and trust to luck and chance.

Several times, through the medium of intercourse with wandering parties of Esquimaux, he had heard from Aggalootka; but she was always at such a distance that to desert from his ship, with the view of making his way to her, was a hopeless undertaking.

His secret was known to but very few of those with whom he sailed, for he seldom talked upon the subject; but he came to be well known at Honolulu and Lahaina as the man who had made so many successive seasons up north, and who, when he had spent his summer's earnings, — for his habits were improvident and even profligate when on shore, — was always ready to ship again, but always for the Arctic region, never for the Okotsk or Japan Sea or any other whaling-grounds.

I know that I argued the case seriously with Tom, enlarging upon the folly of such a wild-goose chase; but all to no purpose. In vain I argued that his Aggie, although she might still have a longing feeling for her English husband, was better off where she was, and that in all probability she had found happiness with some brave of her own nation years ago. Tom seemed to have become possessed with a single idea, and the Arctic seas and shores had a strange fascination for him.

It mattered not that Aggalootka, if still living, was probably but a bleary-eyed, blubber-eating matron, growing prematurely old in that dreary and God-forsaken region. He cared for no such argument. To again find her was the one great purpose of his life;

and though, from the manner in which he was pursuing it, there seemed little prospect of his attaining any definite result, he had no other ties, to bind him to his own or any other country, and he, as well as other men, might be permitted to chase his hobby or single idea.

But Tom, who is getting on past the meridian of life, and getting rather stiff for active service in whaling, has of late years sought the position of ship-keeper, in which I am told he has been highly valued, as an experienced seaman and a lifelong voyager in the Polar waters.

While near Point Barrow, last season, in the "Desmond," he learned some intelligence which raised his hopes to a high pitch, as showing that she whom he sought was not far away. He asked for and was promised his discharge; but the ship, with many others, was soon afterward beset in the ice-floes, and left to her fate.

At the time of her abandonment, the veteran ship-keeper insisted on remaining by the vessel, claiming himself to be too far

advanced in years to undertake the risk of the terrible journey upon which his shipmates were about starting.

They left him, they said, much excited, and full of confidence that he should reach the shore, and be saved. As Tom's wife would certainly never again leave the home of her ancestors, it follows that Tom himself must turn Esquimau for her sake.

I trust that some of the hardy whalers who may visit the scene of the late great disaster during the next summer may bring me some reliable account of one whom I recall to mind as a highly esteemed shipmate, despite his one strange idiosyncrasy, controlling his whole life through a period of twenty-eight years. It may well be said, in this instance, that "truth is stranger than fiction;" and true enough it is, that many wiser men than Tom Dawson have made lifelong fools of themselves for love of women who gave less in return for that love than did the young Esquimau squaw who figures in these pages,—Aggalootka or Agnes Dawson.

MANSLAUGHTER.

BY W. H. MACY.

I had been several weeks adrift in New York, for the ship in which I had arrived had been sold to New-Bedford parties to be transformed into a whaler, and I was thus thrown out of employment. Freight was dull, seamen a drug in the market, and I had begun to realize that the great city of Gotham was not a desirable place for a sailor to be in for any great length of time with *no monthly pay running on*. I was not only getting into debt to old Veazie, the landlord with whom I boarded, but was wearing my welcome out, and made to feel that my room was better than my company.

New-comers had arrived who had money to spend, and it was "Get up, Jack, and let John set down," as old sailors cleverly describe this state of things.

I had taken a stroll down one of the piers on the East-River side, without any particular object in view, but merely from the force of daily habit, and to kill time. It was a pleasant surprise to me to recognize the pleasant face of Mr. Murdock, the mate with whom I had sailed on the last ship, who was coming rapidly up the wharf, with a busy and cheerful air about him, as if he had really some purpose in view, though I knew that he had been like myself a victim of the blues when I last met him.

"Hollo!" he hailed, "got a voyage yet?"

"No," said I gloomily, "and I don't see any chance of getting one this fall. But what's in the wind with you, Mr. Murdock? You look as if you had struck oil or found a gold-mine."

"Why, I've got employment," he answered, "and I think there's a chance for

you, too, if you go for it without losing time. I've shipped mate of that ship, there, the 'Vindicator,' cotton-loaded, bound for Liverpool. We sail this afternoon. The crew are all on board. As she has got a second-mate, you can't get that berth,—I wish you could,—but she is one able-seaman short, and that's better than idleness."

"Of course it is," said I. "I'm your man. Where's the agent?"

"Here: come with me." He turned back, and we went down together to where the agent and the captain were talking together. Within ten minutes my name was duly entered as one of the crew of the "Vindicator," and I had my month's advance jingling in my pocket. There was enough to wipe out old Veazie's score; and after a parting glass to a prosperous voyage, I shouldered my bag which contained all my personal estate, and joining my old friend Mr. Murdock, we reported ourselves on board. Before the sun set we had discharged our pilot, and were leaving Sandy Hook in the distance.

That night in the middle watch, the mate had a chance, for the first time, to talk a little about the new situation. We agreed that the "Vindicator" was a good sailor, and worked remarkably well for a cotton-laden ship.

"But I suppose," said Murdock, "that she has been loaded in a hurry, and her cargo is not screwed very tightly, and she's of that build that you can't load very deeply. Even now she is high out of water, and does not seem to have any such cargo as her manifest shows."

"It appears to me," said I, "that she is not very well found in rigging and sails, though she may have more spare stores than I have any suspicion of."

"Mean enough in that respect," returned the mate, "though this is, of course, between you and me. There's no spare cordage worth mentioning, and her running gear is all so worn, that even for this short voyage there'll be a grand chance to practice the arts of knotting and splicing before we get to Liverpool. However, Captain Burke seems a very fair sort of man, and says he shall buy all that is needed when we arrive there."

"Well," said I, "I can only hope that we shall not have much heavy weather on the passage out; for, if we should carry away anything, we should be crippled, with little or no means to help ourselves."

My wish was gratified, for the weather continued for the most part very moderate, and we had a good run across the Atlantic Ocean.

Captain Burke was certainly not a bad man to sail with, being rather quiet and reserved, while the crew were as fair average as merchantmen's crews run, made up of various nationalities. So the voyage was a pleasant one on the whole, and unbroken for a month by any occurrence of startling interest.

We had observed that Captain Burke frequently held long talks aside with the steward, who was an Englishman of fair intelligence, but this circumstance carried no weight in my mind until I came to look back upon it afterward. The two had sailed together before, and it is no uncommon thing for a commander to be on familiar terms with a favorite subordinate, especially with one who holds a position in his own end of the ship, and near his own person.

When within a few days' sail of our port, Captain Burke one morning directed Mr. Murdock to overhaul the long-boat, caulk her, and put her in complete order for service. She had been housed over and used as a receptacle for odds and ends, a part of her having also been occupied as a pig-pen; but the order seemed to the mate a little unexpected, as she was not likely to be needed in Liverpool dock. However, we went to work upon her, and put her in thorough condition, to the entire satisfaction of the captain.

As we drew in to the entrance of St.

George's Channel in the night, we ran under easy working canvas, and when we went below at four o'clock in the morning, leaving the starboard watch in charge, everything looked promising for a speedy and successful termination of our outward voyage. But just as day was breaking there was a grand uproar and alarm, among which the cry of "Fire!" was to be heard, and the odor of smoke was the first that saluted our waking senses. The "Vindicator"'s fore-castle was a sort of house built in above the spar-deck, an inconvenient and dangerous arrangement in heavy weather, but one which left more room for stowage of cargo under-deck.

Thus we had only to rush out at the door, half-dressed, and we were directly in the midst of the confusion, and, half-choked, we rushed aft to get to windward of the smoke, as the wind, blowing on the ship's quarter, drove it directly forward upon us.

There was much stir and excitement among the crew and officers, and some contradictory orders were given, for there appeared to be no organized plan to make an effort to subdue the fire. But as the mate jumped out of the cabin he appeared to take in the situation at a glance, and issued orders to man the waist-pump, and pass along water. The smoke was pouring up in thin wreaths through the joints or cracks of the main-hatches, but he ordered us not to lift them off until we were ready with water for fighting the fire.

"It's no use, Mr. Murdock!" sang out the captain, as he now for the first time made his appearance among us. "You can't save the ship!"

"How do you know we can't?" demanded the younger officer sharply.

"Because I've looked in there from aft, through the bulk-head, and I know the fire has got too good a hold. We must bring her to the wind at once. Stand by there, to brace up the yards!"

"I don't think there's much fire, sir," answered Mr. Murdock. "I believe we can put it out if we make the trial, and if we run her on her course in shore, we can keep the fire smothered for a long time and get her in port, or very nearly so, before our lives will be in any danger."

"Hard-a-port your helm, and brace up the yards!" thundered Captain Burke. "I tell you, Mr. Murdock, it is madness to undertake to fight the fire. The cotton is smould-

ering between decks, and as soon as you start a hatch, she will be all in flames. Lay hold of the long-boat, and slew her round here, ready to launch her out of the gangway. Lay the maintopsail right in aback. It's well we put the long boat in order, Mr. Murdock, though you did n't think she would be needed so soon."

"No, sir, but I suspect you did!" answered the mate, in a fierce whisper, which was overheard only by me, who happened to be standing nearest to them at the moment. "Captain Burke, I've not been in the habit of deserting my vessel at the first alarm without an effort to save her."

The men obeying the orders had already slued the heavy boat athwart the deck under the leadership of the second mate. The captain turned away for a moment from Mr. Murdock, then turned back again, as if he had decided upon the course he was to take.

"Look 'e here, young man!" said he, "you and I ought to be friends, and I hope we shall be. I heard your suspicious words, and now let us understand each other. If you ever repeat them or let any hint of the kind pass your lips, you shall be haunted to death, wherever you may hide yourself! And bark ye," he continued in a more peaceable tone, "I don't want to threaten, nor quarrel with you. Keep your mouth shut, and carry out my orders. And here." He put something with a chinking sound into Mr. Murdock's hand. I could see but indistinctly what was done; but having had my own suspicions, I was intensely interested in this colloquy from the moment they first addressed each other, and was now crouching where I could overhear it without being seen.

I could have sworn to what would have been the next movement, for I knew Reuben Murdock to be the very soul of honor, and his temper to be very quick and proud. The touch of the money upon his hand was like pollution. Quick as thought, the gold pieces were hurled back into the face of Captain Burke with a force that must have cut into the flesh. He staggered back, livid with rage, and seized an iron belaying-pin from the rail. I rushed forward to prevent murder, if possible; but my shipmate, quicker than a flash, had struck out from the shoulder with his left fist, and the captain toppled headlong over the side. He was standing on the poop, which at the

sides had only a low rail about the height of his knees, and the force of the blow, for which he was unprepared, had knocked him clear overboard!

There was an expression of horror in Mr. Murdock's face, as he realized what he had done. But a moment satisfied us that there was no help for the captain: he would not rise again, until the sea should give up its dead. Stunned by the blow, he had sunk at once, and my dearest friend had the blood of a fellow-being upon his soul!

He thought there had been no witness of the affair, for he did not know I was near him, until he found me looking over the rail at his side.

The pall of smoke between us and the second-mate's gang hid them from view, and there was no one at the helm, the last helmsman having locked the wheel when the maintopsail was thrown aback, and left it to take care of itself.

"I know all," I whispered, "I have seen all, but I am the only witness."

"I'm glad you do know all," he answered huskily. "I did it in self-defence: there lies the iron bar that was to have crushed my skull, and there the accursed gold that he thought to buy me with. The pirate, for he is no better, has gone to his account. But I can save the ship yet. To your duty, now. Take the helm, and put it hard up! Belay all with that long-boat!" he roared in a voice of thunder. "Square in the maintopsail!"

The men, with blind instinct of obedience, hurried to obey the orders which were to pereunptory. But the second-mate ventured to ask, "Where's the old man?"

"Gone overboard, I think," was the answer, which every man could hear. "Either tumbled, or, what's more likely, jumped overboard. But don't stop to ask questions. I command this ship now, and I'm going to take her into Liverpool, if you obey my orders. Steady, so!" he cried, turning to the helmsman: "rig the waist-pump, and pass along water."

Instead of lifting the hatches, he ordered them covered with tarpaulins, and everything made as tight as possible. A tub, with hose attached, which had been used at New York when filling the fresh-water cask in the stowage, was now brought into play. It was slung up to the mainstay, so as to hang a few feet above the deck, and thus water could be thrown through a small pipe

with considerable force. As the volume of smoke rolled forward again now that the ship was steered off free, we were able to work without being choked by it, and Mr. Murdock, sending another man to the wheel, directed me to take charge of the hose and pipe, which had been led down through a small opening in the after-hatch.

The job was no comfortable one for me, for it was hardly possible to stay under deck to do it.

But, keeping a wet piece of canvas round my head so as to overhang my eyes, I fought hard, while the mate drove the men up to their duty, and kept the water supply coming down through the hose with a full head of power. After a little while I got the run of the spot which I supposed to be the nucleus of the fire, and kept the stream playing hard upon that one place. For a long time it was impossible to tell whether the fire or the water was gaining, for the whole space forward of where I stood was filled with thick smoke, which found its chief vent only at the little fore-escape under the deck-forecastle before mentioned. The whole half of the ship, from the main-mast to the bows, both above and below deck, was entirely uninhabitable. I became exhausted at last, and was glad enough to breathe the fresh air once more, as Mr. Minott, the second mate, jumped down to relieve me, the after-hatch being closed again as soon as I was up. Still we kept the hose-tub full and the pressure on, and after several hours of steady work, it began to be whispered that we were really gaining. The smoke was less dense than at first, and as no flame had been seen, we felt confident now that we could drown it out.

All this time the ship was making swift headway toward her port, and though the weather was hazy, three or four vessels had been seen which passed us near enough to see something of our mishap.

But no signal of distress had been hoisted by Mr. Murdock, nor the slightest deviation made from our voyage. He was bound to take her to Liverpool if it could be done; but if the worse came to worst there was the long-boat, and rescue was sure, in these waters, to be not far off.

Meanwhile the English steward had been set to work with the rest, passing water; but he could not conceal his unwillingness to make any exertion to save the ship. The mate had his eye upon him from time to

time, and understood now the real truth of the matter. When at last it was quite certain that we should be able to save the ship, a cheer went up from all hands save one. The steward was the only one who appeared to be disappointed—the wrong way.

Suddenly he threw down his bucket with a thrilling cry, and rushed frantically up to the mate with a countenance expressing no bad counterfeit of horror and mortal fear.

"I've just thought of it! The powder, Mr. Murdock! Captain Murdock! The powder! the powder!"

"What powder?" demanded Mr. Murdock. "What are you talking about?"

"Oh, the powder! ten kegs of it stowed in the lower 'old, directly under the fire! We shall all be blown up, if we don't get clear of the ship and save ourselves!"

The mate seized the ring of the after-hatch, and jerked it off.

"Down there, and haul the powder out, if you know where it is. Either get it out or stay there with it. By Heaven! if the ship blows up I'll make sure that you go up with her!" and, seizing the steward in his iron grasp, he kicked him down the hatch-way, which was at once closed again.

I spoke to Mr. Murdock in a low tone. "What do you think of this new danger?" I asked.

"No danger at all," he answered confidently, "because there's no powder down there. The fellow was the only one in the captain's secret counsels, and the trouble is, he hasn't got his pay yet, which was to have been something handsome if the ship had been lost. He finds that she is to be saved; and it has just occurred to him, very suddenly, that he could crowd this lie upon me because I knew nothing about the stowage of the cargo. I don't believe there is much cargo under the lower deck, anyhow; but we'll soon find out, if we can get the fire under."

The energy and will of one resolute man held all hands to their stations, but kept the work going on. All seemed to stand in awe of their new commander, and no reference had been made to the strange disappearance of Captain Burke since the answer to the second-mate's question.

It was not until afternoon that we ventured to open hatches and go to work between decks, smothering and squelching out what was left of the fire. There was something of a general average among the bales

of cotton, and the deck-beams and carlines were charred, and in some places deeply burned; but, after all, a few days' work in the way of repairs would make the vessel as good as ever. We found her to be heavily ballasted in the lower hold, but, excepting what was between decks, there was really no cargo worth mentioning. What had been a vague suspicion as to the gigantic fraud intended upon her underwriters was now a clear certainty.

In due time we took a pilot on board, and proceeded on up the Mersey to Liverpool. But the rumors of the *strange doings* on board had preceded us, and we found ourselves and our vessel objects of great curiosity and notoriety. The legal authorities took such a special interest in us, that we were all arrested and held to await an investigation. We learned that the "*Vindicator*" had been insured to the value of a full cargo of first quality cotton; and that most of the risk was in a Liverpool office, having been taken by their New-York agency. There had been several shipwrecks under suspicious circumstances within a short time, and there was no doubt that these Liverpool underwriters had now got hold of a *ship* which it was never intended should reach port: *they had the complete evidence* under their very eyes, and would sift the matter to the bottom. Then there was the mysterious disappearance of the captain to be accounted for, occurring as it did so suddenly, and at the most critical period of the story. Altogether it was a case which excited the most intense and wide-spread curiosity.

There was some sparring upon the question of jurisdiction, for the consignees had employed counsel to defend the insurance case, and tried hard to get the whole crew sent back to America that the trial might take place there. But as it was made apparent that the "*Vindicator*" was really a British ship, that the insurers were English, and that the attempt to destroy the vessel was made in British waters, it was decided to go on with the investigation.

Man after man of the crew was called to the stand, and subjected to a fire of questions and cross-questions, but all told the same story without hesitation or deviation. They had been shipped after the loading was completed, and had reason to suppose the ship had a full cargo of cotton. They could give no account of the origin of the

fire; knew only that they had first seen smoke coming out at the chinks of the main hatches. The last they had seen of the captain he was on the quarter-deck, after the ship was hoisted, and there seemed to be some disagreement between him and the mate, though no one thought it anything serious, so they were not uneasy about it. The second-mate testified, as to the question he had asked of Mr. Murdock, and the answer given, that the captain had either tumbled or jumped overboard.

The suspicious conduct of the steward of course came out; and when that worthy was called to testify, he was severely cross-questioned. But he made the best story he could, admitting that the gunpowder scrape was only an invention of his own, but declaring that he gave this alarm solely from his fears for the safety of his own life and his anxiety to get clear of the wreck.

Of course this statement was what might be called "too thin," in the face of the fact that he was careful to wait until the climax of danger was past before he gave the false alarm.

He could tell no more than his shipmates had done of the suspicious disappearance of the captain.

Then my name was called, and I was placed under oath to tell all that I knew in the matter. I proceeded to answer all the preliminary questions much in the same words that had been used by the others, though at that moment I knew nothing about the previous statements, as only one witness was brought into court at a time. My testimony went on swimmingly until I was brought upon my guard by the question, —

"Did you see anything of Captain Burke, subsequent to his going aft on the quarter-deck, after having given the order to get out the long-boat?"

I hesitated a moment, but soon decided to answer, "Yes, I did."

"State all you know or saw of him subsequent to that."

I hesitated longer than before, and finally decided not to answer. I took the literal ground that the answer was not relevant to the subject, but the magistrate told me that he and not I was to be the judge of that matter, and insisted upon a reply. I cared little for his threats for contempt of court, and refused to budge from my position. The case at issue, I said, was be-

between the insurers and the owners, or rather the charterers, of the ship "Vindicator," although I had no doubt that Captain Burke was implicated in the fraud, and knew all the facts about the cargo, or rather deficiency of cargo. But I argued, if I told all I knew of his fate, the story might seriously compromise another person, an intimate friend of mine, who was not then on trial, and against whom there was no charge pending. If I must be compelled to tell all I knew, this person should at least have a right to hear my statement, as he would do if he had been regularly arraigned as a criminal.

Finally, the court, finding me determined even to obstinacy, and being specially anxious to get all that I knew, without further delay, consented that Mr. Murdock, who was the only witness remaining to be examined, should be brought into the court-room, and confronted with me.

The young mate entered the court-room with an easy, confident, I might almost say defiant, manner. Our eyes met, and I read in that one look all that I wanted. I was to tell the whole truth without reserve or precaution: he was ready to listen to it all, and to confirm it by his own testimony when called upon. To be sure, I might have known all this before, from my observations of the man's character, but it was a great comfort to me to have him present, and to meet that honest, re-assuring look.

I told the straight-forward tale of the quarrel and the blow, omitting no circumstance which I thought would throw light upon a full understanding of the truth. I told, with a pride which I could not conceal, the story of his conduct afterward, and how the ship had been saved and brought into port by his coolness and resolution.

But, when Reuben Murdock himself stood up and took the oath, a sensation at once ran through the assembly. As he went on with his testimony, no words can describe the impression produced by his open, fearless face, and his brief, pointed answers, every word of which bore the

stamp of truth. He had no grounds of suspicion, he said, against Captain Burke up to the time of the fire, though he thought it odd that he should have been so careful to put the long-boat in sea-going order just at that time. He had since thought much about the private talks between the captain and the steward, though he attached no importance to them when they occurred. He now believed the steward to have been accessory to the plot for destroying the ship, if not indeed the actual incendiary.

The case appeared clear enough to all who had followed the evidence, and a spontaneous cheer burst from the whole assembly as the counsel declared that he had no further questions to ask. My friend came down from the stand with the step of a conqueror rather than that of a culprit.

As a matter of form it was necessary to detain and try him on a complaint for manslaughter; but as all the evidence was known before, the case might be said to have been prejudged, and he was sentenced to such a trifling term of imprisonment that his punishment was more like an honorable acquittal than anything else.

Through the influence of the underwriters, he at once obtained command of a fine ship, and I sailed as an officer with him on that and other subsequent voyages. There was always a shadow of sadness upon his face and in his manner whenever that eventful voyage of the "Vindicator" was referred to, but I think his feeling was nothing like remorse in the ordinary sense of the word. He had merely resented an insult as it seemed, and had struck the blow in self-defense. The steward, being held for further examination, became frightened, and being also disappointed of the payment he had expected for his rascality, confessed the whole truth, implicating also the other guilty parties.

For the confession his own escape was connived at, and he was allowed to go free, not a richer, but, it is to be hoped, a wiser man.

MISS HANNAH'S LOVE-LETTER.

BY FLORENCE H. BIRNEY.

CHAPTER I.

"I wonder if I shall look like Miss Hannah when I attain her advanced age," said Gertrude Lorrimor, drumming idly on the window-pane with her slender, white fingers, and watching the drizzling rain.

"Of course not, Gertrude. How foolish of you to ask such a question! Miss Hannah never could have been a beauty, even in her palmiest days; and you are acknowledged to be the handsomest girl in Bayville."

"You are always ready with some morsel of flattery, Nettie," laughed Gertrude; "and I assure you I appreciate your kindness. Still, I am not sure that I shall not be as plain as Miss Hannah one of these days. Did n't Aunt Grace say that she was once quite a belle in Bayville?"

"It must have been nearly a century ago, then," cried Nettie Morris, with a scornful laugh. "But what set you to talking of Miss Hannah?"

"I saw her go by the window with her charity basket," replied Gertrude.

There was silence in the room for a few minutes, and then a sudden exclamation from Gertrude caused Nettie to look up quickly from the crocheting over which she had been busy all the morning.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"Come here quick, Nettie. Dr. Astley is coming out to get into his buggy."

Nettie sprang up, and stood by her cousin; and both received a bow from the tall, handsome doctor who had just closed the door of his elegant house behind him, and run lightly down the step to where his buggy stood, the servant standing at the horse's head.

But, as Dr. Astley had one foot on the step of his buggy, a hand fell on his arm; and, turning, he saw the small person of Miss Hannah Graves, attired in a rusty waterproof cloak, rubber overshoes, and a plain bonnet; while on one arm hung the "charity basket."

"Your face is full of trouble, Miss Graves," said the doctor, politely holding

his umbrella over the little woman, "and I am sure you need my help in some case of wretchedness. What is the particular trouble today?"

"It is very fortunate I met you," said Miss Hannah, in the sweet voice which was one of the charms that had not vanished with her youth. "I do need you very much. I have been down to see the Brewers; and I find that the old lady has rheumatic fever, Mr. Brewer has cut his hand terribly with some glass, and poor Rachel is nearly ill with watching the poor baby. It is my belief that the child will not live many days. They have not sent for you, because they have no prospect of money to settle your bill; but if you will see what you can do, Dr. Astley, I will be responsible for the bill."

"I never send in bills to people as poor as the Brewers, Miss Graves," said Dr. Astley, with just a trifle of hauteur in his manner; "and I will go to see them at once."

"Thank you," said Miss Hannah simply. "I have always gone for Dr. Case; but, as you know, he is too ill to leave his house at present."

And she moved on, bowing slightly to the doctor as he sprang into his buggy, and took the reins.

"Did you ever see such impertinence in woman before!" exclaimed Gertrude, who had watched the scene very intently, though no words of the conversation had reached her ears.

"The idea of stopping him in that manner!" said Nettie. "She did n't seem to care what we thought of such conduct; and she saw us here too. Gertie, it is my belief that she is in love with the doctor, and is trying to attract him. You know old maids are always on the lookout for a chance to change their condition. Be careful, Gertie, if Miss Hannah is your rival. She can't fail to win."

And both the cousins laughed merrily and long.

Well might proud Gertrude Lorrimor be called a beauty; and it was no wonder that

she was called the belle of the town. Tall, with a perfect figure, hair of a blue-black, eyes like midnight, a clear, dark complexion, and regular features, she was a beauty, and she knew it.

Left an orphan at eighteen years of age, Gertrude had been only too glad to accept the offer of her aunt, Mrs. Morris, to take her into her own home and family, where she could share the pleasures of her cousin Nettie. Not that Bayville suited Gertrude at all, — she thought it much too small a town in which to parade her beauty and her accomplishments: but still for three years she had been contented if not entirely satisfied; and, being wholly penniless and dependent on her aunt for everything, she did not allow her dissatisfaction to be seen. She was anxious to marry well, and therefore Dr. Astley was looked upon by her with favor. He was young, handsome, wealthy, and stood high in his profession; and Gertrude could not ask for more. He had evidently been impressed with her beauty and accomplishments, and had paid her some attention, but never yet had assumed the character of a lover; and Gertrude inwardly fretted at what she mentally termed his "horrid dilatoriness." She had no fears as to the ultimate result of his attentions; but she was in haste to secure her prize. Her disposition was a jealous one, and she could not endure seeing even plain Miss Hannah talking to the doctor.

Miss Hannah, however, would not have minded in the least if the whole village had seen her in conversation with young Dr. Astley. Her whole mind and soul were bound up in the welfare of others, and the greater part of her time was devoted to the poor and afflicted, doing what lay in her power to help them. Miss Hannah was only thirty-four years of age, though Gertrude and Nellie gave her credit for ten years more, and she was very plain indeed in appearance, and never troubled herself much about the fashions, or cared if the two frivolous girls at Mrs. Morris's made rude remarks about her clothes. She had seen very little of Dr. Astley, although her cottage was on the same street with his elegant, roomy mansion, and within a stone's-throw of that of Mr. Morris.

Dr. Case, who was Dr. Astley's senior by thirty years, was the one to whom Miss Hannah went with her tales of sorrow and sickness; but now the old doctor had been

ill for several days with gout, and she had mustered up sufficient courage to apply to Dr. Astley for help for the Brewers in their affliction.

Miss Hannah had been a pretty girl in her youthful days. Hers had been one of those soft, sweet faces which win the love of all. But, though lovers had come to her, she refused them all. Her life was devoted to the invalid mother and crippled little brother who made up the household, and she would allow no new duties to interfere with the old.

So the years had flown by, taking Miss Hannah's youth, bloom, and freshness with them; and now the dear mother and poor brother, for whom she had sacrificed a woman's dream of home, were laid beneath the church-yard sod, and only Hetty, the maid-of-all-work, who had been with her through all these years of sacrifice to duty, remained with her in the little white cottage in Bayville.

Hannah Graves had been "Miss Hannah" to all the village for many a year, and her small, sprightly figure and "charity basket" were well known in the town, and there were few who did not give her due praise.

But she had incurred the ill-will of Gertrude Lorrimer and Nettie Morris by giving them a booth in a charity fair which did not suit them at all. They wanted the flower-stall, around which the young men congregated; but this Miss Hannah refused them. The flower-stall had been given to two young girls who were poorer in this world's goods than were Gertrude and Nettie, and no persuasions could induce Miss Hannah to make a change. The position and wealth of Gertrude and Nettie had no effect on her, and they vowed to have revenge for the slight they fancied had been put upon them, and from that time forth lost no opportunity to ridicule and censure the plain little spinster.

CHAPTER II.

The windows of the breakfast-room were wide open, the fire not made, the table destitute of dishes or repast, and it was nearly half-past eight o'clock.

Dr. Astley was standing on the hearth-rug, with a decided frown on his handsome face.

"This sort of thing has gone on long,

enough," he muttered impatiently. "I order breakfast at eight o'clock, and never get it until nine. My fire is never built in the study, and every one of my shirts needs an overhauling. I suppose I'll have to change my housekeeper or else get married."

A vigorous pull at the bell-cord caused the entrance of the cook, whose face was flushed, and whose manner was hurried and cross.

"Where is Susan?" Dr. Astley asked. "And why is the dining-room in such a state of disorder? Am I to have any breakfast today?"

"Susan is with Mrs. Beck, sir; and she has n't had a minute to see to the room. I had to go to the milkman's, and to tell Miss Sims that Mrs. Beck wanted her today; so my breakfast is n't ready."

"Does Mrs. Beck require Susan's services every morning? It appears to me that my comfort is of no moment to any one. Tell Susan to come to me at once; and let me have my breakfast without further delay, please."

Susan, a plump, rosy girl, answered her master's summons after some delay. She said Mrs. Beck had a headache, and she had been required to bathe it; but Miss Sims was to come to nurse the housekeeper the rest of the day.

Leonard Astley tried to keep his temper; but, as he ate his hastily prepared breakfast, he made up his mind to have a change of dynasty.

"Mrs. Beck has imposed on me long enough," he thought, "and treats me as if she thought she were conferring a favor by remaining here. I pay her twenty dollars a month to lie in bed, and have Susan wait on her, while my comfort is of no moment whatever. There 's Singleton: he stood housekeepers and boarding as long as he was able, and then married pretty Florrie Truedale. Now he has a pleasant, comfortable home, his buttons are all sewed on, a congenial companion is always at hand, and I worry on with Mrs. Beck. I have a mind to propose to Miss Lorrimer. I wonder if she would make me happy. She seems like a pleasant, nice girl; and she is young and handsome enough to grace the home of any man. I am thirty-three years old, and it is time I was settled; so tonight -- no, tonight I must go to Singleton's -- but tomorrow night I will call on the fair Gertrude, and have my fate decided. If I

am so fortunate as to win her, I can say adieu to Mother Beck, and welcome comfort, ease, happiness" --

The door opened, and the entrance of a portly woman in a showy wrapper interrupted Leonard's train of thought. She sank into a cushioned arm-chair, with a heavy sigh, and requested Susan to hand her a cup of coffee.

"Mrs. Beck," said Leonard, "a few plain words occasionally do a world of good. I find that my comfort is very much neglected. This morning the fire was out, the room cold, and my breakfast an hour late again."

"I am too ill, Dr. Astley, to listen to such complaints," sighed Mrs. Beck. "I could not spare Susan this morning to attend to her usual duties."

"If you need a lady's-maid, you had better hire one, not depend on Susan," said Dr. Astley angrily; "and, furthermore, if you would rouse yourself occasionally, and try to do something to earn the wages I pay you, it would be a great deal better for your health."

The face of the portly widow grew scarlet with rage. She trembled from head to foot, and her eyes blazed with wrath.

"You talk as if I was a servant, Dr. Astley," she screamed shrilly, "when I came here as an accommodation, simply as an accommodation, sir."

"Perhaps then, as an accommodation, you will leave," said the doctor grimly.

Whereupon the housekeeper burst into tears, and gave symptoms of hysterics, which sent the doctor from the room and out on his rounds with all haste possible.

CHAPTER III.

Meanwhile Nettie Morris and Gertrude Lorrimer were discussing, in the privacy of their parlor, a plan which seemed to afford them the opportunity to revenge the slight Miss Hannah had put upon them at the charity fair.

"I would give anything if I could see her read it," said Nettie. "I declare! I can't wait with any patience for tomorrow to come."

"I think I deserve some credit for imitating his handwriting so well," said Gertrude. "I am sure she will fully believe it is a genuine love-letter. How I would like to see her answer!"

"Very likely he will keep it, and, when you are his wife, he will show it to you, *Gertie*," said *Nettie*, who believed as fully as her cousin that the doctor's attentions were seriously inclined to matrimony.

"Oh, of course, and we will laugh over it together," replied *Gertrude*.

"I rather think *Miss Hannah* will feel very much mortified when she finds out that she has accepted the doctor's bogus offer," said *Nellie*. "You think there is no doubt of her accepting, *Gertie*?"

"Not the least," replied *Gertrude*, in a tone of confidence. "You see, *Nettie*, he is a very eligible person; and I rather think *Miss Hannah* would not refuse a man whom I would accept. No: you may be sure she will be only too glad to say 'Yes.'"

"Suppose we go up-stairs, and read the letter over again," suggested *Nettie*; "and then you can copy it, and I'll find *Johnny Brewer* tonight, and make him take it for us."

The cousins left the parlor, and spent the greater part of the morning re-writing and reading over the document which was to bring such dire mortification to poor *Miss Hannah*.

That night, as *Dr. Astley* was returning home after spending the evening with his friend *Mr. Singleton*, who had married such a pretty wife, and was not troubled with a housekeeper of the *Beck* order, a violent gust of wind blew into his face a sheet of paper.

The doctor was deep in thought about his contemplated offer to *Gertrude Lorimer* the next evening, and caught the paper mechanically in his hand, and abstractedly thrust it into his pocket, where it staid, completely forgotten by the dreaming doctor, who was in the midst of fancying *Gertrude* in his arms, confessing her love for him; for in spite of his thirty-three years, constant work, and petty trials, *Dr. Astley* had not outlived all romance.

He passed the white cottage of *Miss Hannah*, and was surprised to see a light still in the window of the cozy parlor. The curtain was drawn aside; and he stopped a moment, attracted by the comfortable aspect of the whole room. The fire was burning cheerily, the cat lay on the rug, and *Miss Hannah* sat in a cozy arm-chair, an open letter on her lap, and her hands crossed idly.

"How pleasant it looks in there!" thought

the doctor; "and, for once, *Miss Hannah* is idle. She is a good little woman, and I like her. If I don't find a fire in my study, I'll come back here, and call on the poor little thing. I wonder what she would say."

And the doctor laughed at the thought.

But, for a wonder, he found a fire in the study, and so did not have an excuse for calling on *Miss Hannah*. Perhaps, if he had done so, he would have been the recipient of a surprise as great as hers; for the letter which he had seen lying on the lap of the spinster ran as follows:—

"MY DEAR MISS HANNAH,—During the past three weeks we have seen more of each other than ever before, and I have learned to love you devotedly. Dare I hope that I may win you for my own? Your grace and loveliness of person have stirred this heart, which has never before succumbed to woman; and my only fear is, that you will not think my love worthy your acceptance. If you can give me a favorable answer, write it, and bring it to my door tomorrow at four o'clock. Susan will see that it is given to me at night, for I shall be away all day. If your answer is unfavorable, if you feel that I am not worthy the blessed boon of your pure young love, send me no reply. Your silence will be sufficient to tell me that my hopes, my life, my ambition, are blasted and ruined forever, and my heart blighted evermore.

"Yours devotedly,

"LEONARD B. ASTLEY."

This was the letter over which *Miss Hannah* was dreaming in the firelight. Perhaps to a young lady with whom offers were plenty this letter would have been stamped as counterfeit at once; but it had been ten years since *Miss Hannah* had received a love-letter, and the language to her did not sound unnatural. During the three weeks which had elapsed since she had stopped in the rain to tell *Dr. Astley* about the afflictions of the *Brewer* family, they had met very frequently. *Dr. Case* was only just beginning to grow better, and *Dr. Astley* had had his hands full. In the hovel of every poor patient, in the town hospital, and among the needy of every grade, *Dr. Astley* had seen *Miss Hannah*; and, while she had learned to admire and love him for the gentleness and patience he showed on every occasion, he had learned to know

how noble and generous a heart beat in the breast of the little old maid. But he imagined that the woman he was to marry was Gertrude Lorrimer, whose bright, dark beauty and graceful manners were to make his home an earthly Eden.

Miss Hannah was astonished at receiving her letter. A continued rapping on her cottage door caused her to open it, to find the letter tied to the knob, but no one in sight. Johnny Brewer had done his errand well, and had spent, in tops and marbles, the money Nettie had given him.

Miss Hannah had seen the handwriting of the doctor very frequently, and Gertrude's clever imitation would almost have deceived the doctor himself.

When the little old maid read the joint production of the girls, the tears came into her soft blue eyes. She never doubted the genuineness of her love-letter. As she read what it said of her grace and loveliness, a sigh escaped her lips.

"How I wish, for his sake, that I was lovely and graceful!" she mused as she sat by the glowing fire. "How can I really believe that he loves me! He is so noble, rich, and handsome; and I have thought he loved Gertrude Lorrimer, and pitied him, for she will never make any man happy. And to think, that, after all, I am his choice! I never dreamed that such happiness could come to me. He was telling me, only yesterday, how lonely he often was in that elegant house of his, and how Mrs. Beck neglected his comfort in every respect. I felt sorry for him then; and to think that now I have the chance to make his home bright and happy!"

So Gertrude Lorrimer was right. The letter of acceptance was written before the little woman slept that night; and, at four o'clock the next day, the two girls, who were eagerly watching, saw her give the precious missive into Susan's care.

How they laughed and rejoiced as they saw her move slowly away, in deep thought! — their little old maid, whom they had so cruelly deceived. They were delighted at the success of their plan, and speculated as to what the doctor would do and say, and whom Miss Hannah would accuse of the deception.

CHAPTER IV.

When Dr. Astley returned home at eight

o'clock that evening, he found Miss Hannah's letter on his study table. He read it through, with dismay and astonishment.

"Poor little creature!" he exclaimed, "who could have been capable of so cruelly deceiving her? I did not think she had an enemy, her life is so blameless and noble. What shall I tell her? How shall I explain matters to her?"

He read the letter over again, and was impressed by the modesty and gentleness which pervaded it.

Walking up and down the room, perplexed at what had occurred, and vexed at being in such a false position, Dr. Astley suddenly thought of Gertrude. This was the night he had set for calling on her, and deciding his fate. He had little doubt that her answer would be a favorable one, and yet here he stood as good as engaged to poor little Miss Hannah of Rose Cottage.

He drew his handkerchief from his pocket; and, as he did so, a piece of crumpled paper fell to the floor. Thinking it might be of importance, he picked it up, and opened it.

As he read it, his face grew very grave and sad, and his lips were sternly compressed. For an instant he could not remember where or how it had come into his possession; and then he recollected the sudden gust of wind that had hurled it into his face the night before.

Was it fate, I wonder, which made the wind blow from the open window of Gertrude's bedroom this scribbled sheet, and fling it into the doctor's face? For on the paper was a rough draft of the love-letter Miss Hannah had received, and on the reverse side, scribbled with many quirls and flourishes, the names of the two young girls who had planned to mortify the little old maid.

"And to think, but for this crumpled piece of paper, and what it contains, that I might have married that girl!" mused the doctor. "The whole plot is clear to me now; and, instead of loving Gertrude Lorrimer, I thoroughly despise her. How could she stoop to this!"

Then he threw himself into an easy-chair, and abandoned himself to thought.

The result was, that he rose to his feet half an hour later, with a smile on his face, donned his overcoat and hat, and left the house, going in the direction of Miss Hannah's cottage.

Gertrude Lorrimer saw him from her window, where she was keeping watch; but she did not know his thoughts, or she would not have laughed and clapped her hands so gleefully.

CHAPTER V.

"Poor little thing!" the doctor thought, as he saw the light in Miss Hannah's parlor window. "She is expecting me, of course. Well, her tender, generous heart shall not suffer through me; and I shall do all I can to make her happy."

Miss Hannah opened the door for him, and then shrank timidly back; but he put both his strong arms around her, and drew her to his breast.

"My arms are your shield, and my breast is your resting-place forevermore, dear Hannah," he murmured.

"O Leonard!" she replied, "if I can only make you happy! But I am so old and so faded" —

"You are mine now, and I won't allow my property to be depreciated," was the doctor's answer.

The surprise and chagrin of Gertrude and Nettie can well be imagined; but they had

only themselves to thank for the strange result of their heartless, unmaidenly, wicked hoax, that might have resulted in driving so sensitive a soul to lasting shame or even to death itself.

They never learned from Dr. Astley or his wife that it was surmised who had written Miss Hannah's love-letter: for the doctor never spoke to either of the girls again, but passed them with only a cold and formal bow; while his wife never knew, to the day of her death, that her love-letter had not been a genuine one. That cruel knowledge was kept from her by her devoted husband; for Dr. Astley had learned to love his wife most tenderly and truly, and under his care and kindness she grew rosy and bright again as in her youthful days. She no longer denied herself nourishing food and beautiful clothes, for she was surrounded by peace and plenty.

As for the doctor's handsome house, it became a different place. Mrs. Beck's reign was over; and, under the supervision of a mistress who studied the comfort of all, the servants gave no trouble whatever, and Dr. Astley often mentally blessed the day on which Miss Hannah received her bogus love-letter.

MR. SWALLOW AT THE PICTURE GALLERY.

BY LOUISE DUPEE.

It was April weather; but a snow-storm had fallen during the night, and now the snow was mildly melting under the laughing rays of the sun.

Mr. Swallow, who had been ordered by his physician to spend a few weeks in the city, was pensively wending his way toward a picture gallery in the brightness of the morning. An exhibition of rare foreign paintings was being held; and a friend had presented him with a ticket, praising the collection enthusiastically. But Mr. Swallow was homesick, and his thoughts fondly turned to sugar-making and parsnips freshly dug from the mellowing ground.

"Now I like good pictures as well as any one," he said to himself, as he neared his destination, "but I don't suppose I shall be anything but bored by these dauby, new-fashioned paintings. Still, as long as Boston's going to cure me, I rather guess I'd better swallow it, anniversary meetings, picture galleries, boarding-houses, sloppy streets, and all. I'd rather make my own pictures, by a long chalk, though."

Mr. Swallow considered himself an artist. His mother had no idea that there was a greater in the world; and in the rural neighborhood where he took up his abode he was looked up to as "a master-hand for drawin'." At the age of fifteen, stimulated to glorious action by the brilliant colored crayons achieved by his cousin who "learnt" at Daysville Academy, he "did" a Landing of the Pilgrims which dazzled the eyes of the whole town. It remained to this day the chief ornament on the walls of his mother's parlor. And his mother was wont to explain proudly to admiring strangers. —

"Sammy drewed it, 'n he never took a lesson neither." He had always been promising to paint one just like it for his Aunt Phebe Jane, but was almost afraid to venture a second time, for fear of detracting from his glory by achieving less of a success. He had once written poetry, too; but that was also when he was brave, and young, and blithe, and in love. The gilded

wheat-field that glittered between his home and that of Malvina, the roses in its hedges, the flight and song of the robins, the whistle of the winds that wandered that way, inspired him to pour forth his emotions in song. But Malvina was false, and since the unhappy day when his eyes were opened to this fact, his effusions were missed from the poet's corner in the "Daysville Messenger." But he still regarded himself as a poet, and when a book-agent insisted on his purchasing a copy of Milton's "Paradise Lost," he assured him that he preferred to make his own poetry.

His experience with the fair Malvina had caused him to be distrustful, not only of women, but of all mankind. He gave himself up to melancholy forebodings, and seemed to enjoy them, — fondly anticipated the cholera every summer, small pox or scarlet fever every winter, and a house-breaker every night.

Now that he found himself in Boston, he felt more deeply than ever that there were perils on every hand. He abstained from going out very much in the evenings, not only on account of the state of his health, but a footstep behind him in the darkness caused him the most horrible sensations of nervousness, and he was continually anticipating a quick and stunning blow, a hand at his throat, and a hoarse whisper in his ear, — "Your money or your life!" But now in the broad daylight, though he kept a good lookout for pickpockets, he felt only the dreary pangs of homesickness; none of the terrors which were wont to haunt him at the melancholy edge of the spring evening, and later when the flickering lights seemed only to make the dark spaces between more intense and suggestive of tragedy.

"I wish I was going to sit in the store at home a spell this morning, and hear what Neighbor Brown has to say of this pesky Chinese question, instead of in a good-for-nothing picture show with so many other staring people," he said to himself. "Thank fortune it's forenoon, though, and the women won't be out in great force: they'll

be looking after their house-work, as a matter of course."

But no sooner had he crossed the hall and stood before the entrance to the gallery, than he was seized with a presentiment of evil, and waited there a while quite overcome by its intensity. Then, with a mighty effort, he shook off the feeling, and pressed bravely forward.

"This ticket cost fifty cents," he said, "and I'm going to get my money's worth out of it, and see everything there is to be seen, whether I care about seeing everything or not, or I'll allow myself to be an idiot. Perhaps my watch is going to be grabbed in the crowd, though, and, oh!" the thought nearly took his breath away, "perhaps some woman is going to take a fancy to me."

The gallery was not crowded, moreover. It was only comfortably filled; but to Mr. Swallow's dismay, the greater portion of the visitors were ladies. Silken trains rustled over the floor, plumes nodded. There was a light ripple of talk, and soft, musical laughter, and a scent of violets in the warm languid atmosphere. Spring dawns in the picture galleries before it smiles in the outside world, and the early exhibitions are its herald as truly as the blue-birds. Maud's evenings being oversprinkled by the sombre ashes of Lent, which quench their festal lights, blight their flowers, and hush their music, she pathetically folds away her festal dresses until violin, flute and bassoon shall wake the music again. Then, adding a few dainty, spring-like touches to her sombre Lenten dress, she betakes herself to the picture galleries, where Augustus is often to be found, and the distractions of flirtation dispel the gloom of existence.

Mr. Swallow became embarrassed, and gazed upon the pictures, not because he was absorbed by their beauty, but because he perceived that all gentlemen unaccompanied by ladies were occupying their poetic souls in this manner. And then with so many of the opposite sex around him, he dared look nowhere else. But he became a trifle bolder by degrees, and retiring to a remote corner, soon gathered sufficient calmness to think. Lovely Italian scenes glimmered on the walls before him. Soft mountain peaks, swimming in rose and violet mist, rose on dark backgrounds. In palace balconies jutting over gleaming water, there were glimpses of beautiful dusky

faces, the sheen of pearls and the soft tracery of damask silk discovered by the moon's rays.

There were sunny English landscapes with a fresh coolness which could almost be felt, as one gazed upon them in the April green of the meadows, in the shadows under the drooping trees. There were summer mornings by the sea with fields smiling, ships sailing, breezes blowing, sail-boats nodding, and the clouds overhead making silver shadows on the green, tossing grass. Bits of pale yellow evenings by lonely wayside pools, where nothing is but stillness, and only night is looked for. Icebergs, drifting down to dissolve in summer currents, in their white, silent majesty.

"Pooh," said Mr. Swallow with a somewhat contemptuous toss of the head, "my Landings of the Pilgrims will beat any of these all hollow. I wonder why I never thought to have it exhibited. My figures have some life and color in them, now," and he was recalling the effect of the pink pilgrim confronting a purple Indian, with a strong feeling of pride, when he was recalled to a sense of the peril of his surroundings, once more, by the sound of two low, but extremely earnest, feminine voices in his immediate neighborhood. He looked anxiously about him, and discovered two young women cozily sitting behind a little Japanese cabinet which upheld a rare antique vase. Mr. Swallow, being situated in such a manner that he could do so without fear of being detected, gazed upon them curiously.

"There's something queerer than common about these two women, but what 'tis I can't exactly tell," he thought. "One of them looks rather wild, I should n't wonder if she felt desperate about something, for it is evident that she has n't combed her hair for weeks. And the other, though she is well-favored, her bonnet looks like a flower-basket, poised on the back of her head, has the oddest ways I ever saw, — acts something like Charlotte's canary bird when you go toward its cage."

"Exquisite, isn't it?" said the "well-favored" one, indicating a marine view with dim, shady blues blending in sea and sky.

"It is a poem," replied the other, clasping her hands in a sort of ecstasy.

Then there was silence of some moments, which was suddenly broken by the first

speaker, who leaned toward her companion, and demanded eagerly, but with an air of mystery. —

"O Helen! have you disposed of that troublesome lover yet? I have been thinking of your perplexity concerning him ever since I saw you last."

The desperate-looking one started, — looked about her as if in alarm, — then replied in a tone which curdled Mr. Swallow's blood, —

"Marie, I have killed him!"

"Killed him! How? Did you poison him in a cup of glittering wine? or did you lure him to the edge of a lofty precipice, and recklessly, madly push him over? Was there one quick, agonized shriek, a dull, terrible crash, and then a horrible stillness?"

Mr. Swallow wiped the cold perspiration from his brow with a trembling hand. His eyes were distended with horror, he was scarcely able to stand.

The murderess actually laughed.

"Hush!" said she, with another startled, guilty glance about her, "you speak too loud. I did neither. But do not ask me now, — the horror of his tragic end is still too fresh in my mind to allow me to talk on the subject even to you. Imagine the feelings of a murderess. But it is getting late, dear Marie," she added with a creamy sort of smile. "Let us take one more glance at that charming little twilight scene in the corner, and then hasten home."

Mr. Swallow shuddered.

"So Malvina might have murdered me if fate had not parted us forever," he thought. "Women are all like this, I have no doubt, especially in large cities, only they are so subtle and sly that they do not get found out."

Then a sense of responsibility came over him like a flash. Was it not his duty to place this awful woman, who talked of her crimes so calmly, in the hands of justice before she should be able to take the life of another unsuspecting man? Perhaps she was insane, — she really looked as if she had just escaped from a lunatic asylum. But in any case it would be a sin, since he had heard her horrible confession, to allow her to run at large. And crumming his hat on to his head with great violence, he hastened out-of-doors in search of a member of the police. Fortunately, before he had taken twenty steps, he nearly ran into the

arms of a stalwart officer, who regarded him with wondering and suspicious eyes.

Mr. Swallow was pale as death. His eyes projected, his teeth chattered; but he managed, after several unsuccessful efforts in this direction, to reveal the dreadful tale to the astonished policeman.

"Are you sure that those were precisely the words which passed between the two ladies?" he inquired with an air of incredulity.

"Sure!" said Mr. Swallow, "I wish I was n't so sure. My health is n't very good, and they gave me such a turn, I shall never get over it. I thought 't was my duty to bring out their secret; but now I must go back to the hotel and rest a spell, or I sha' n't be able to eat any dinner, and that landlord is making a good deal out of me as it is."

"Not so fast," said the policeman; "you must go back to the gallery with me, and identify the two ladies. I cannot make an arrest unless I am sure of their identity, of course."

And, though much against his will, Mr. Swallow was obliged to obey.

"Stand here at the foot of the stairs, and we cannot miss them when they leave the building."

They waited a few moments. Two stately old ladies with catalogues in their hands appeared, and were drawn away in a carriage. A young gentleman with a young lady tucked under his arm came next, followed by a group of laughing girls. Then, after a little space, footsteps were again heard on the stairs.

"There they are," said Mr. Swallow, bending forward to look up the stairway, forgetting his horror for a moment in the sense of his own great usefulness and importance in the case.

The policeman did not look up, — he waited and listened.

The two ladies who were slowly descending the stairs were conversing eagerly.

"You are too sensitive, Helen," one was saying to the other, just as they stepped into the street and brushed against the anxious policeman, "but so long as you have murdered the fascinating Richard I will let him rest in peace."

The policeman, after one quick glance into their faces, hesitated a moment. But he had once lost his place for lack of vigilance. Strange things were happening

every day; and it might be, though his sharp professional eye could detect nothing of the criminal in the appearance of either, that they were guilty.

"Ladies," he said as gently as possible under the circumstances, "I consider it my duty to arrest you. The evidence of this gentleman, who appears to be sane, though excitable, is very much against you; and what I have heard with my own ears corroborates his testimony."

And he related what he had heard from Mr. Swallow, word for word, demanding an explanation of the same.

Both ladies, who seemed fairly overcome with amazement at first, but afterward assumed an air of inexpressible dignity, were now constrained to burst into laughter.

"It is all my fault that an explanation is necessary," said the younger of the two, with lady-like composure, and so allow me to explain."

"My cousin, who is the daughter of Mr. ———," mentioning the name of a well-known and highly honored citizen of Boston, "is writing a novel, though she has kept the undertaking a secret to every one except myself. The person whom she con-

fesses to have murdered is merely one of the characters in the story. I objected to such a disposal of the gentleman, but, in case she should persist in depriving him of life, have discussed with her the most effective and artistic way of doing so."

The policeman, who was at once convinced of the truth of her statement, looked very foolish, and apologized with fervor and confusion.

"Nothing worse than literary," said he to himself. "That's just what the murderess looks like too."

And he hurried away from the scene as fast as possible, resolving that he would keep the whole affair to himself.

But Mr. Swallow was not satisfied with the explanation by any means, and wondered at the credulity of the officer. The very next morning he started for home, fearing to take a long breath until he caught sight of his own farm-house roof.

And more than once on his homeward journey he fancied that the wild eyes of the murderess were gleaming upon him through the tangles of her uncombed hair. The doctor was surprised that his visit to the city had resulted unfavorably.

MRS. SPENCER'S SUMMER BOARDERS.

BY LOUISE DUPEE.

"Pa don't approve of my taking summer boarders, I know," said Mrs. Spencer to Aunt Maria, wiping her ample brow with an air of perplexity; "but I'm sure I don't see how I'm going to get along any other way, since the rheumatism has stiffened his joints so that he can't do anything on the farm. Jennie's been promised the school in the south district, to be sure, and commences to teach next Monday; but, lor! girls must have so many fol-de-rols now-a-days that I can't expect her wages to do any more than clothe her. Jennie's pretty proud, though she's a good girl as ever lived."

"Well, for my part," replied Aunt Maria stiffly, "I don't blame Samooel. I'd rather pick berries for a livin' if I was in your place, and let the farm go. 'T a'n't dreadful good land no way. And jest think of the Turners. How did they make it takin' summer boarders? Mis' Turner slaved herself almost to death. And then to hev that silly Claribel of hern go and hev a broken heart 'cause that good-for-nothin' city feller, that was there wastin' his time a-fishin' and a sprawlin' on the grass, said 'Boo!' to her, and then went off and never come back again."

"But the Turners built that new fence round their front yard they had needed so long, papered their house from cellar to attic, and fixed up as smart as could be, after their boarders left. They must have made something certainly. And, if I am willing

to take boarders, I don't see why the family should complain. Of course all the hardest of it will come upon me."

"Lor! I was n't thinkin' nothin' about the work's bein' too hard. You hev your health, Louisy, and a'n't laid up with a good-for-nothin' day every now and then, like Mis' Turner; but it's the disrespectability of the thing I was thinkin' of. But you never did hev no lookout for Jane Clinton, and she's gittin' to be a regular flirt. What kind er works do you suppose you'll be hev'in' here when you git one of these city fellers into the house, that won't hev nothin' to do but to tell her what pretty eyes she's got, and take pretty walks with her along that dreadful romantic road to the school-house?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Spencer, looking rather indignant, but also relieved, "my Jennie's a sensible girl. I should like to see any one turn her head the way that goose turned silly Claribel Turner's. And then I am not going to take any young men; only a gentleman and his wife from New York, and two ladies,—old-maid school-teachers, I judge them to be, from Boston."

"Well, I don't 'prove of summer boarders nohow," still objected Aunt Maria. "They most generally are a dreadful bad lot, and go to walk an' p'r'aps ride on the sabbath. I would n't harbor 'em under my roof if I was to starve. I did n't believe it when James come home the other night, and said you was a-goin' to git into that biz-

ness, Louisy. You 'd better hear to your husband. The Spencers was always known to hev a good lookout."

And, with this parting advice, she took her departure, and walked over to Uncle Tom's to discuss the question further with the inmates of his family.

Jennie, a bright girl of eighteen, entered the room, with a merry smile on her countenance, as soon as Aunt Maria had taken her departure.

"It was the summer boarders this time, was n't it, mother?" she asked. I did n't feel like being lectured this morning, so I did n't venture to meet my stern relative."

"Yes, it was the summer boarders," sighed Mrs. Spencer; "and, Jennie, I confess that I had been having misgivings myself on the same score, until I found out that Mr. Lorimer was married, and would bring his wife with him."

"What score?" questioned Jennie, looking very blank.

"Why, on your account, dear. Of course you remember that affair of Claribel Turner's?"

Jennie burst into a merry peal of laughter, but concluded with a little burst of indignation.

"O mother!" said she, "do you think I am like Claribel Turner? And is this the cause of Aunt Maria's suffering? I don't care what she thinks or says; but, mother, I regard it as a positive insult from you. Really, I am glad to know the opinion you have of me. One's relations are always appreciative."

"Girls will be girls, Jennie; and, though I am sure you are not like Claribel Turner, if there were a strange young man under the roof it would n't be long before you two would be getting pretty well acquainted, and, if there were no flirtation in reality, all the neighbors would be saying that there was, and noticing every time he looked at you."

"Very well, mother. I can't keep our summer boarders from looking at me if they wish to do so; but I promise you that I will not look at them — the gentlemen, I mean — any more than is necessary to keep from running against them in the halls, after I take one good look at them at first to see whether they are handsome or not."

"But there are no gentlemen coming, you know, — only one gentleman; and he's married. I'm thankful for that, certainly."

The next Monday morning, the spare chambers were duly aired, and all of the boarders were expected on the noon train. Jennie filled the house with flowers from the front garden, and then hastened to school, wondering what they would be like. Mrs. Spencer was nervous, and came near putting two cups of salt instead of two cups of sugar into her cake. Mr. Spencer walked uneasily on the piazza, as if in some deep suspense. And even the house-cat felt the weight of some coming event, and washed herself more thoroughly and contemplatively than she had done before since the new minister came, and the sewing-circle met at the house of her mistress.

About eleven o'clock, the old yellow coach, which drove twice a day from the Stilltown depot, stopped at the gate. Two slender ladies, with eye-glasses and a great many bundles, presented themselves first, with exclamations of delight concerning the lovely old trees which drooped around the mansion that was to be their abode for future weeks. Then came a frank, bright-faced young man, supporting a very fat, rather elderly lady, who looked a mixture of helplessness and good humor.

"Mrs. Lorimer won't be ready to leave home for nearly a month, so I ventured to take her place and take care of my nephew until she comes," announced the fat lady, who was soon afterward introduced as Mrs. Harris.

Mrs. Spencer was glad to see Mrs. Harris, and hoped that she would find her room comfortable. Mr. Lorimer looked about him, well pleased, and conversed with the Boston ladies, Miss Grant and Miss Burton, very pleasantly. Mrs. Spencer could not account for her feelings; but she could not help regarding him with pangs of suspicion, though she allowed that his countenance and bearing were anything but calculated to excite suspicion.

When Jennie came an hour and a half later, the ladies were all in their rooms, resting from their journey, or preparing for dinner, and Mr. Lorimer was the sole inmate of the parlor, sitting in a semi-shaded window, looking over a photograph album, which contained pictures of the family, with an expression of deep satisfaction on his fine, clear-cut features.

Jennie did not perceive him at first, and walked carelessly into the room, swinging her broad-brimmed hat by the strings.

He rose and came quickly toward her.

"Oh," said she, coloring deeply and betraying a recognition in spite of herself.

"I am delighted that you remember me," said he. "I think it is just one year ago to-day since I went sketching on Pine Hill, and had the pleasure of meeting you. It was the first day I ever spent in this neighborhood; but I made up my mind then that it should not be the last."

Jennie bowed, and, with great dignity, left the room, running swiftly up-stairs to her own little chamber. Her mother, anxious for a few confidences on the subject of the new arrivals, came hurriedly slipping in.

"'T is n't going to be half so bad as I expected, Jennie," said she. "I think I shall like them all. The two school-teachers are dreadfully homely, and affected, too, I think, but they seem to be nice pleasant women, and Mr. Lorimer's aunt (Mrs. Lorimer is n't coming for some time yet, so he took his aunt in his wife's stead) is very social, and not a bit airy. Dinner is all ready, and I am sure the table looks nice, though I do wish we could have had some new knives and a snow-drop pattern tablecloth like Aunt Maria's. But, dear me! I must hurry down again; for I'm not sure that I put the cover over the vegetables, and they will be getting cold. I'm going to ring the bell for dinner now."

At the mention of Mrs. Lorimer, Jennie had started a little, and a vivid pink flush overspread her features; and, as soon as her mother had disappeared from the room, she produced from a drawer a certain scrap of paper which she had cherished very tenderly for a year, and on which was drawn a hasty sketch of Pine-Hill scenery, and tore it into little bits which she scattered to the four winds of heaven. Then with an extremely dignified air she walked down-stairs and entered the dining-room where the boarders were already assembled.

Jennie's seat was beside that of one of the school-teachers and quite at the other end of the table from Mr. Lorimer, who looked as if he did not at all approve of the state of affairs, especially as she devoted herself to this lady and her companion, and never even glanced in his direction unless he addressed a remark directly to her. After dinner he started off for a walk, and, when Jennie was about half way to school, appeared suddenly by her side on the Wishing Bridge. He startled her very much as

she had stopped to look over the railing into the bright running water for a few moments, and was quite absorbed in thought.

"May I walk with you a little way?" he asked, looking down into her face.

"Oh, is it you, Mr. Lorimer? How you startled me," she said when she had recovered herself sufficiently to speak. "This is the Wishing Bridge, and I never cross it without wishing."

"The Wishing Bridge? well, it's a charming spot certainly: I must make a sketch of it some day. And are the wishes granted which are wished here? I was n't aware that there was any magic about it, but I was wishing when I stepped on to it—I will tell you some day if my wish is granted. It was the most earnest one I ever wished in my life. I am wishing it every moment."

Jennie looked at him with surprised indifference.

"They are supposed to be granted," said she, "and all the young people of the village come here to wish about their love affairs."

"And was it your love affairs that you were wishing about?" he asked with a gravity which was hardly suited to the occasion.

She colored deeply.

"Of course: what other thing have young women to wish about? Dear me, it is nearly school-time. I must hasten."

"And I may accompany you, may I not? You have n't given me permission yet. I am going over to Brant's Pond."

"I certainly cannot forbid you the use of the highway," she said, laughing, "especially as it leads directly to your destination."

"But you prefer to walk by yourself," he said, stopping suddenly and looking both confused and hurt.

"I assure you it is a matter of perfect indifference to me," she answered haughtily. "The schoolhouse is not far, only just beyond that bend in the road."

"Confound it! what has come over the girl?" he thought. "How different she is from what she was that day on Pine Hill. She's prettier than ever, though her manner has grown fearfully pert and disagreeable, like that of her cousin Jack's at his very worst. What a fool I was to fall in love with her, and do nothing all this year but to think of her, and plan how to meet her again! I was afraid Jack's going to Europe would put an end to everything, but

here I am after all, under the same roof with her. Well, I flattered myself that I had made a little impression on her at the time, but now I see that that was all a delusion. She's as subtle a flirt as one born to it in fashionable society. How the poor rustic beaux in this neighborhood must have suffered at her hands!

"When do you expect your wife, Mr. Lorimer?" questioned the object of his thoughts with cold clearness, startling him out of his senses. He was walking on the other side of the road, looking decidedly unhappy.

"My wife! Miss Spencer, indeed, I was not aware of possessing any such commodity! How strange for you to imagine that I was married!"

"I did n't imagine it, Mr. Lorimer. My mother told me so: she thinks so certainly. She said that your wife was n't ready to leave home yet, so your aunt came in her stead," said Jennie, trying not to look glad.

"My mother was n't ready to leave home. An old friend came to visit her from the West. I suppose I said Mrs. Lorimer (she is only my step-mother), and she misunderstood me. When I wrote to her concerning board, I spoke of her as Mrs. Lorimer also."

"I am quite sure you did, for she always supposed that you were husband and wife instead of mother and son, and—Mr. Lorimer—if you don't mind, I think it will be just as well to let her think so."

"Why?" exclaimed Mr. Lorimer, looking very blank. "I don't wish her to think so by any means, and then my mother will be here in a few weeks, and she certainly must know then."

Jennie burst into an immediate fit of laughter, in spite of herself.

"Nothing, only she will like you better. She prefers married boarders. I cannot tell you why, but it is very, very funny."

Mr. Lorimer looked bewildered.

"And you believed that I was a married man, Miss Spencer?" he said, looking down into her face with something like reproach in his glance.

Jennie colored violently.

"Yes, I believed so: why should I not, Mr. Lorimer?" said she indifferently.

But there was something in her manner which contradicted the indifference, and he took heart.

"Jennie," said Mrs. Spencer with trouble in her countenance two or three weeks later, "I thought you were n't even going to look at our gentleman boarder, and here you have been seen walking with him nearly every day since he has been here. Aunt Maria says so, and really, Jennie, I do not like his manner toward you at all. He does n't take his eyes off you at the table, and I must say that you seem to be pretty well acquainted with him, also. Miss Grant asked me if you had ever met before, and she looked very queer, I thought."

"Miss Grant would do better to attend to her own affairs, and Aunt Maria also," said Jennie coolly, "and mother dear, with your consent, I am engaged to marry Mr. Lorimer."

Mrs. Spencer came near fainting.

"Why, he's a married man already!" she exclaimed. "O Jennie, Jennie, what are you thinking of?"

"Oh, no indeed, mother! you're mistaken. He spoke of his mother as Mrs. Lorimer, he always does so, because she is not his own mother, only his father's wife, and you misunderstood him."

"Well, if he is n't married, he is one of these flirting city beaux and he does n't mean what he says. O dear, dear me! it is just as Maria prophesied, after all. What can you know about him or his family either? and you've only known him a little more than two weeks. Oh! what shall I do? what will your father say? How he will blame me because I insisted on taking summer boarders against his advice!"

"Father likes Mr. Lorimer very much, I am sure," said Jennie with dignity, "and all the misgivings I have are because I am not good enough for him. He is one of Cousin Jack's friends, and in the letter which I received from him this morning he speaks of him in the highest praise (but I did not need that to convince me that he was everything that is noble). He says that his family are of the oldest and best in the State. Then he has wealth, and we are so poor. He has had every possible advantage, fashionable society, foreign travel, every means of culture, while I am as ignorant a country girl as ever lived."

"Ignorant!" exclaimed her mother indignantly. "Why, there is n't a girl in the country that's had more advantages. Did n't you tend Springvale Academy for three years running, and all your aunts and un-

cles pestering me about our extravagance in keeping you there?"

A queer little smile passed over Jennie's features, but she said nothing.

Then Mr. Lorimer came into the room, and having overheard something of the conversation, pleaded his own cause with the afflicted lady, and not in vain.

"What objection have you to me as a son-in-law?" he asked at length, seeing that though she consented and believed him to be an honest man, there was something which troubled and disturbed her dreadfully. "I can see that you are not satisfied with me by any means, Mrs. Spencer."

"I think it is a great deal too soon," said she. "Why, Samuel courted me two years before he found out that he really liked me better than anybody else, and then I was n't ready to say yes when he asked me the first time."

"But there is something else," he persisted. "I am sure of it."

Mrs. Spencer colored, hesitated, and looked very much disturbed.

"No," said she, "I have no objection to you, only I would rather Jennie should n't marry a summer boarder, that is all."

Mr. Lorimer found it impossible to restrain his laughter.

"I am delighted to know that you have nothing against me individually," said he. "I guess I can bear it since it is only collectively."

But in spite of Aunt Maria, who never withdrew her objections from the husband of her niece, Mrs. Spencer grew very complacent of her son-in-law after a while, and used to boast to her neighbors concerning Jennie's fine establishment in the city, Jennie's carriage and Jennie's silver, "and there never was such a devoted husband as hers in the world, though I can't say I approved of the match at first," she always used to invariably add with a little pensive smile.

MY CHRISTMAS PRESENT.

BY LOUISE DUPEE.

It was the day before Christmas, and we entered the dining-room of our boarding-house with more drooping spirits than usual, — Gertrude, John, and I. Tom had not yet arrived; and, notwithstanding the landlady's melancholy warning that our dinner would be spoiled, as well as his own, we waited for him some time, sitting round the festive board. Not that that board was especially inviting, or the spicy but plebeian odor of sausages particularly agreeable to our accustomed nostrils, but we missed Tom, and had no appetite for the luxuries set before us when he was away. Then Gertrude had placed the little bouquet of roses and pansies which John had just brought her between the broken-nosed gravy-dish and a melancholy plate of saleratus bread; and the bright blossoms counteracted depressing effects, and hinted that it was a *sunshiny world, in spite of poverty, and the gloom of boarding-houses.*

There were no other boarders in the house at present, and madame did not think it worth the while to make an extra effort to please such an unprofitable set as we, who occupied attic rooms, and, it was very evident, were nobodies. Indeed, she regarded us with so much bitterness, that, strange to say, we sometimes felt as if we were the cause of her fallen fortunes, and ate the thin, consumptive, holiday mince-pies with a feeling of guilt, — the very raisins therein crying out against us for hard times, and the preying upon a lone widow.

In old days, when the table was full, she had sometimes smiled, a little, frosty smile; but now she always frowned. Her eyes were red, and her sorrowful nose sharpened to a point. The rich-old-gentleman boarder, who had the most charming invalid's appetite for mush, had gone where landladies are not, nor any more tears. The dry-goods clerk, who lent such an air of style and elegance to the establishment by his fine dress and fine manners, thought he was n't appreciated by his fellow-boarders, and went where there were more young ladies, and consequently more appreciation. The old-bachelor merchant, who, although he

might have been particular, never opened his mouth to find fault, had been taken in by the wiles of a pretty school-mistress across the way, and was committing the folly of housekeeping. The retired minister, who had enough money to support himself comfortably without making an exertion to save souls, did not dare to trust the small, white light of his piety against such a *background of iniquity, — card-playing, dancing, opera-going, and the like, —* and had sought a safer abode. The two maiden ladies who subsisted on tea and pickles had quarreled, after years of soul-sisterhood, and each had flown to fresher fields and pastures new for consolation in her cruel heart-wounds. So every week there was more mush and less pastry, more beet-pickles and less sugar, and the "days darkened round us," and hope grew dimmer. But we were usually a very jolly set of young people, regular Bohemians, all of us, used to ups and downs and disappointments, but defying the worst that fate could do, with our merry spirits. And now it was not a falling-off of our daily food alone which cast the little cloud over us, by any means, — though to the healthiest souls too much oatmeal mush is a shadow; it was the coming of Christmas which suggested the saddest of all words, "*it might have been.*"

John and I were brother and sister. Gertrude was my friend, and John's betrothed; Tom was John's friend, and my betrothed. John was a journalist, Tom was an artist, Gertrude wrote stories for magazines, and I was a music-teacher. We had a high opinion of each other's ability, and confidence in our own; but as yet we had won more poverty than money or fame. We hoped prodigiously, we worked moderately; our castles were the most wonderful ever set a-floating by silly young souls, and when they tumbled to pieces, we sighed a little at first, then laughed like children, and, like children, proceeded to build them again higher than ever.

But we were beginning to be too old to be so careless, even for gypsies, and looked life and ourselves inquiringly in the face,

and were trying to be in earnest in something besides loving and hoping. John wrote really powerful articles, full of fire and vigor; but some way he was always on the unpopular side politically, and his fine satire was continually touching the wrong person's weak points: otherwise, his success might have been great.

Tom painted charming pictures: his coloring was almost equal to that of the old masters, I thought, and his drawing wonderfully fine. But the public is slow to appreciate merit, though it seemed to have opened its eyes of late, and, having sold one or two landscapes successfully, the dear fellow felt himself already on the loftiest heights of fame,—though in a few days after these sales his pocket was as depressingly empty as ever. He had scarcely a decent coat to cover him, but had indulged in his own and my fondness for old china and antique ornaments! I, who was growing a grain more common-sense, with added years and experience, took him to do for this last piece of extravagant folly.

Gertrude's stories were of the highest order, bright, fanciful, subtle; but they were not in such demand in the market as to bring high prices,—which, as John was continually remarking, was the surest test that there was genius lurking darkly in their brilliant pages.

As for me, the salary I received for playing on the organ in the little Episcopal Church was small, and my pupils were of poor families, who could not afford to pay much for lessons. I was the owner of a good, well-trained voice, and had been invited to join a successful and highly respectable concert-troupe, with the promise of a very respectable salary; but Tom could not bear the idea of my singing in public, so I gave it up for his sake. Taking everything together, we did not seem to be any nearer having a home of our own than we had been a year before; though we had said then, as well as on the year before, "By next Christmas we shall have done with landladies and gloomy rooms and frowning looks and cold coffee and hopeless dinners." And this Christmas we were a little more gloomy than on the last, and the last Christmas we were more gloomy than on the year before; and so on.

Ah, what bliss that little home of our own was to look forward to! Once there, it seemed as if the whole world would change;

that editors would be more open to reason; that the public taste for pictures would be suddenly refined and cultivated into an appreciation for Tom; that story-writing would bring the fortunes its writers deserved; that every utterance of that "heavenly maid," music, would be straightway coined into gold for a follower like myself; that housekeeping would be the little pleasant recreation in the intervals of the sterner exercise of genius. We had planned a thousand times just how we should manage everything,—how delightfully we would entertain our friends, what jolly, reckless fires should always be dancing on the hearth to brighten our spirits while we sat in its glow, and welcome us home with a cheery sparkle after evenings spent at a concert or the theatre, what daintily spread tables we would have, what a wilderness of flowers in our windows, what a holiday-air should pervade everything, and never a gloomy or an impatient word be spoken under the roof from year's end to year's end!

"Dear me! what shall we do tomorrow?" said Gertrude, with a little sigh, while we sat waiting for Tom. "Must we eat our dinner here, and try to be thankful?"

"We might go to the play, and dine at Copley's afterward, if you prefer," said John, the shadow creeping from her brown eyes into his own.

"But we can be all by ourselves here," said I; "and even this seems more homelike than a fashionable saloon could. That would be dreadful. Don't you wish we had some respectable uncle or grandparent who would invite us all out to his aristocratic country-seat to spend Christmas?"

"No," said Gertrude decidedly; "but I wish it were warmer weather, that we might have a little picnic out in the country, such as we had last fall, and dine on a moss-covered bench, with brown leaves dropping into our cups, and a brook near to sing us a drinking-song."

Here Tom appeared, looking somewhat flushed and excited, and bearing a huge bundle in his arms.

"What made you so late? we've been waiting for you, Tom," said I, looking rather pathetically at the cold sausages that were calmly reposing in a thick, white, uninviting-looking substance instead of gayly swimming in the clear brown sea of fifteen minutes ago.

"Business," he responded briskly: "sold

a picture to a rich old fellow, who did n't care what he paid for it, and thought I would celebrate the event by buying a present for you, Bess."

"Such a huge present as that?" I said, examining the paper with dreadful misgivings. "You are very good, Tom."

Tom looked a little guilty, and as if he dreaded ill. I was growing economical, and it depressed him. John proposed that we should have dinner before the present was brought to light, and then I could enjoy it at my leisure.

"Everything is spoiled," grumbled the landlady. "It is of no use for me to try and provide good, comfortable, warm dinners, if things are going on in this way."

And she wiped her widowed eyes with her apron, and wrung her unprotected hands in the most hopeless manner.

We acted on John's proposal, and made a somewhat hurried and silent meal. Then Tom undid the present, and waited breathlessly for exclamations of admiration and profuse thanks and delight on my part. But neither exclamations nor thanks came at first: we were all too much surprised to speak, even though it was Tom who had purchased the splendid affair, and brought it home to me. It was only a clumsy old casket, exceedingly heavy and antique, and mysterious enough in its appearance to have been one of Portia's caskets; but there was no beauty in its form, or in the crumpling carved work which adorned it, and, as fond as I was of rococco and antique ornaments and articles of furniture, this had very little fascination for me.

"How did you happen to buy it, Tom?" asked Gertrude, who was the first to open her mouth.

"How did I happen to buy it?" echoed Tom. "Why, don't you think it an elegant old thing? Carver's things are put up for sale,—you know he 's dead, poor fellow,—and I considered myself very lucky to get hold of this. He brought it from Rome, with a host of other curiosities. I got it for a mere trifle,—gave only ten dollars for it: just think of that! I thought Bess would be delighted; but she is n't pleased with anything one gets for her lately."

"O Tom, I am pleased!" said I, trying to tell a story with a truthful air. "It looks very antique, and will be a nice place to stow away many things. But, my dear, you

should n't always be buying me presents. I can't help thinking you 're extravagant."

"Grateful!" exclaimed John, who would not allow even me to hint, under any circumstances, that his friend was affected with a failing, whatever opinion I might have of my lover. He was not at all struck by the desirableness of the casket; but Tom liked it, and so of course it must be fine.

"Let us look at the inside," said Gertrude, lifting the creaking lid.

But there was nothing there but a faded red-satin lining, and a musty smell.

"Perhaps one day it was the hiding-place of love-letters, somebody's heart crumbled into tender, maybe despairing words," she meditated; "perhaps some great lady placed her jewels there, warm from her fair neck and rosy ears, after the excitement of feverish, festal evenings; perhaps some sad-eyed Italian mother kept here little relics of her dead children; perhaps"—

I was not in a very good-natured or sentimental mood, so I could not help interrupting her.

"You can make a story out of it for — Magazine, Gertrude," I said; "but in the mean time a sad-eyed New-England girl is going to hide here the relics of her dead past. All the old letters that I do not burn I am going to put into this casket, then lock it up so that neither I nor any one else shall ever see them. Is n't that a worthy use to make of it, Tom?"

Tom seemed rather out of sorts, and by no means over-pleased with me; so we dropped the subject of my Christmas present, and soon grew very merry and forgetful on pleasanter grounds. We planned, as usual, for a next-year's Christmas in our own home; Tom told of an inspiration for a new painting, and how he caught it; John read a most amusing sketch which he had written for tomorrow's edition of the "Times;" Gertrude recited a new and lovely little poem; then I sang songs till bed-time; and we all parted in gay good-humor.

The Christmas sunshine was dazzling my half-opened eyes the next morning, when Gertrude, still in her long, white *robe de nuit*, came stealing into my room.

"Bess," said she excitedly, "I 've been dreaming all night about your casket; and I believe there's a mystery about it that we have n't discovered,—some secret-drawer or hiding-place in it which contains something wonderful."

"Nonsense! that would be too much like a story," said I. "You're so full of stories and romance, Gertrude, dear, that there's nothing but what suggests some mystery to you. Ah! how many such stories I have read. Breathes there any writer of romances with soul so dead that he or she has n't found a secret drawer in something which contained treasures, jewels, gold, or lost letters, for some poor mortal just on the last verge of poverty or despair?"

"It would n't be so very strange if we should find a mystery in this, as it was in that strange Carver's possession, who ransacked all the old Roman houses, and, as he assured me, never even accepted anything as a present which had not a history."

I was sleepy, and floated off into a little nap before she ceased speaking. I opened my eyes again, and she was holding the casket in her lap, intently busied in picking off bits of the silvery ornamental work with her reckless fingers.

"What in the world are you doing with my box?" I exclaimed, raising my head in amazement.

"There! I've found it," she almost screamed. "The opening in the top is so shallow that I was quite sure there was something underneath, if one could only find it. The keyhole was very cunningly hidden under all these carved leaves; but here it is: now for a key to open the drawer. O Bess!"

Thoroughly roused now, even more excited than she, I sprang from the bed, and took my mysterious present into my own hands. Yes: if I was n't dreaming, there was a tiny keyhole; and to my vivid imagination that keyhole was the opening to all the hidden things in creation, all the treasures, all the secrets.

"Oh, do let us find a key!" I said impatiently. "Gertrude, have you any small key? Is there a very small key in the house?"

Gertrude was trembling. We both went in search of the desired article, both looking back over our shoulder at the casket.

I procured the key to my portfolio, to my work-box, to my jewel-case. They were all small keys, but neither of them would fit this lock. Gertrude brought a great bunch of them. She treasured all the keys she ever found, imagining some romance attached to them; and she was always finding keys. She had in her possession those

brought from all parts of the world, and every one had its story, its mystery, its horror, or its pretty secret. But none of these would fit either; so we were forced to curb our impatience, to dress ourselves, and wait for broader day, and the sympathy and assistance of our male protectors.

When informed of our discovery, they pretended to be only mildly interested; but it was evident that they were more exercised concerning it than they were concerning their breakfast, and the landlady was in tears again because her sumptuous feast was growing cold untouched. Tom tried to pick the lock with a hairpin; John produced a wire, and went breathlessly to work upon it. But all in vain: it was loth to disclose its secrets.

"It is a very heavy affair," Tom observed.

And we were dazzled with the thought of gold.

"I detect a perfume hovering about it which I did not notice before I opened the keyhole," said Gertrude.

And we thrilled all over with a delightful sense of romance.

"Something rattles from within when you move it," said John. "I thought it was only the rickety ornaments on the outside, before."

And we felt a little awe-stricken, and half afraid of the mystery.

John was taking an impression of the keyhole in wax, when Gertrude suddenly rushed up-stairs, and soon appeared with a key which she was sure was just the thing.

"It is that dear little key which you picked up and gave to me before we were engaged, John. I keep it on my watch-chain, and forgot it before," she said.

I wondered if everybody was forgetting that it was my casket, and preferred to open it myself.

The key did fit, and a tiny drawer was opened to our view. But—alas for our hopes!—there was no gold, no jewel, to be seen: there was only an old black mask, such as is worn at carnivals, a pair of old silken gloves,—gloves made to fit a fairy little hand,—and a small picture, that looked as if it had once been set in a locket, of the saddest, sweetest, brightest girl's face ever seen. It was painted on a substance like ivory, and was nearly faded out. Then there was a letter, written in Italian, and evidently from a prison.

We had our romance, but not our fortune. I was disappointed at first, so much so that I did not care for the romance; but it was evident that the others were deeply impressed. Tom looked at the picture until I was jealous; Gertrude held the gloves, and looked like one in a spell; while John, who had studied Italian, slowly deciphered the quaint handwriting of the letter. At the breakfast-table he read it aloud to us, and I believe that it was a warning sent to us by Providence, — sent in this mysterious way that it might be more impressive, — for it was nothing but a lament over a youth wasted in dreams, in the building of air-castles, and the loss of everything, even love and liberty, by this means.

We all laughed over it, of course, it was so quaintly written, we said; but we laughed really because we each rather took it to ourselves, and were as embarrassed as if it were addressed to ourselves personally, instead of to some dear brother Simon, who died more than a hundred years ago, perhaps.

John said it was a good joke to come to such a lazy fellow as he was. And, after

all, the casket did prove to be a fortune to us; for Tom went immediately to work and painted a picture, into which he introduced that face, and that picture established his fame, and brought him more money than he had hardly ever seen before; Gertrude was inspired by the romance of the thing to write so fine a story that she was admitted into the most exclusive of all the magazines, and was noticed by the critics in a most flattering manner; John worked from that day with the most earnest will, and was soon acknowledged to be a brilliant writer, and if he was unpopular in politics, could afford to be so; while as for me, when we were married, — Gertrude and John, and Tom and I, — and moved into that little house of our own, I developed such a faculty for housekeeping, such a gift for saving and cooking and making the most of everything, that I am today allowed by all to be the most brilliant one in the family.

This last Christmas was as cheery as we had planned it; and, whatever the others may think about it, I regard my Christmas present with love and gratitude, though I prized it so little at first.